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FICTION

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS

VOLUME II

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A TALE
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HOLDETH
CHILDREN
FROM PLAY
& OLD MEN
FROM THE
CHIMNEY
CORNER

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

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The VICOMTE de BRAGELONNE by ALEXANDRE DUMAS

VOLUME II.

LONDON & TORONTO
J·M·DENT & SONS
LTD. NEW YORK
E·P·DUTTON & CO

First Issue of this Edition . 1912
Reprinted 1921, 1926

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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THE
VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

CHAPTER XCIII

KING LOUIS XIV. DOES NOT THINK MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE EITHER RICH ENOUGH OR PRETTY ENOUGH FOR A GENTLEMAN OF THE RANK OF THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

RAOUL and the Comte de la Fère reached Paris the evening of the same day on which Buckingham had had the conversation with the queen-mother. The count had scarcely arrived, when, through Raoul, he solicited an audience of the king. His Majesty had passed a portion of the day in looking over, with Madame and the ladies of the court, various goods of Lyons manufacture of which he had made his sister-in-law a present. A court dinner had succeeded, then cards; and afterwards, according to his usual custom, the king, leaving the card-tables at eight o'clock, had passed into his cabinet in order to work with M. Colbert and M. Fouquet.

Raoul was in the antechamber when the two ministers went out, and the king, perceiving him through the half-closed door, said, "What does M. de Bragelonne want?" The young man approached. "An audience, Sire," he replied, "for the Comte de la Fère, who has just arrived from Blois, and is most anxious to have an interview with your Majesty."—"I have an hour to spare between cards and my supper," said the king. "Is the Comte de la Fère ready?"—"He is below, and awaits your Majesty's commands."

"Let him come at once," said the king; and five minutes afterwards Athos entered the presence of Louis XIV. He was received by the king with that gracious kindness of manner which Louis, with a tact beyond his years, reserved for the purpose of gaining those men who were not to be conquered by ordinary favours. "Let me hope, Count," said the king, "that you have come to ask me for something."—"I will not conceal from your Majesty," replied the count, "that I have indeed

come for that purpose."—"That is well, then," said the king, joyously.—"It is not for myself, Sire."—"So much the worse; but at least I will do for your *protégé* what you refuse to permit me to do for you."—"Your Majesty encourages me. I have come to speak on behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"It is the same as if you spoke on your own behalf, Count."—"Not altogether so, Sire. That which I am desirous of obtaining from your Majesty I cannot obtain for myself. The viscount thinks of marrying."—"He is still very young; but that does not matter. He is an eminently distinguished man. I will choose a wife for him."—"He has already chosen one, Sire, and only awaits your Majesty's consent."—"It is only a question, then, of signing the marriage-contract?" Athos bowed. "Has he chosen a wife whose fortune and position accord with your own views?" Athos hesitated for a moment. "His betrothed is of good birth, but has no fortune."—"That is a misfortune which we can remedy."

"You overwhelm me with gratitude, Sire; but your Majesty will permit me to offer a remark?"—"Do so, Count."—"Your Majesty seems to intimate an intention of giving a marriage portion to this young girl?"—"Certainly."—"I should regret, Sire, if the application I make your Majesty should have that result."—"No false delicacy, Count; what is the bride's name?"—"Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière," said Athos coldly.

"Ah!" said the king, searching his memory, "I know that name; there was a Marquis de la Vallière."—"Yes, Sire, it is his daughter."—"But he died, and his widow was married again to M. de Saint-Remy, I think, steward of the dowager Madame's household."—"Your Majesty is correctly informed."—"More than that, the young lady has lately become one of the princess's maids of honour."—"Your Majesty is better acquainted with her history than I am."

The king again reflected, and glancing at the count's anxious countenance, said: "The young lady does not seem to me to be very pretty, Count."—"I am not quite sure," replied Athos.—"I have seen her, but she did not strike me as being so."—"She seems to be a sweet and modest girl, but has little beauty, Sire."—"Beautiful fair hair, however?"—"I think so."—"And quite beautiful blue eyes?"—"Yes, Sire."—"With regard to beauty, then, the match is but an ordinary one. Now for the money side of the question."

"From fifteen to twenty thousand livres' dowry at the very

outside, Sire. But the lovers are disinterested enough; for myself, I care little for money."—"For superfluity, you mean; but a needful amount is of importance. With fifteen thousand livres, without landed property, a woman cannot live at court. We will make up the deficiency; I will do it for Bragelonne."

The king again noticed the coldness with which Athos received his remark. "Let us pass from the question of money to that of rank," said Louis XIV. "The daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, that is well enough; but there is that excellent Saint-Remy, who somewhat damages the family,—on the women's side, I know, but damaging all the same,—and you, Count, are rather particular, I believe, about your own family."—"Sire, I no longer hold to anything but my devotion to your Majesty."

The king again paused. "A moment, Count. You have surprised me in no little degree from the beginning of our conversation. You come to ask me to authorise a marriage, and you seem greatly disturbed in having to make the request. Nay, pardon me, Count, but I am rarely deceived, young as I am; for while with some persons I place my friendship at the disposal of my understanding, with others I call my distrust to my aid, by which my discernment is increased. I repeat that you do not prefer your request as though you wished it success."—"Well, Sire, that is true."—"I do not understand you, then; refuse."

"Nay, Sire: I love Bragelonne with my whole heart; he is smitten with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, he weaves dreams of bliss for the future; I am not one who is willing to destroy the illusions of youth. This marriage is objectionable to me, but I implore your Majesty to consent to it forthwith, and thus make Raoul happy."—"Tell me, Count, is she in love with him?"—"If your Majesty requires me to speak candidly, I do not believe in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's affection. She is young, she is a child, she is intoxicated with joy; the delight of being at court, the honour of being in the service of Madame, counteract in her head whatever affection she may have in her heart. It is a marriage similar to many others which your Majesty has seen at court; but Bragelonne wishes it, and let it be so."

"And yet you do not resemble those easy-tempered fathers who make slaves of themselves for their children," said the king.—"Sire, I am determined enough against the viciously disposed, but not so against men of upright character. Raoul is suffering, and is in great distress of mind; his disposition, naturally light and cheerful, has become heavy and melancholy. I do not wish

to deprive your Majesty of the services he may be able to render."—"I understand you," said the king; "and what is more, I understand your heart, too, Count."

"There is no occasion, therefore," replied the count, "to tell your Majesty that my object is to make these children, or rather Raoul, happy."—"And I too, as much as yourself, Count, wish to secure M. de Bragelonne's happiness."—"I only await your Majesty's signature. Raoul will have the honour of presenting himself before you to receive your consent."—"You are mistaken, Count," said the king firmly; "I have just said that I desire to secure the viscount's happiness, and from the present moment, therefore, I oppose his marriage."

"But, Sire," exclaimed Athos, "your Majesty has promised!"—"Not so, Count; I did not promise you, for it is opposed to my own views."—"I appreciate all your Majesty's considerate and generous intentions in my behalf; but I take the liberty of recalling to you that I undertook to approach your Majesty as an ambassador."—"An ambassador, Count, frequently asks, but does not always obtain what he asks."—"But, Sire, it will be such a blow for Bragelonne."—"My hand shall deal the blow; I will speak to the viscount."

"Love, Sire, is overwhelming in its might."—"Love can be resisted, Count; I myself can assure you of that."—"When one has the soul of a king,—your soul, Sire."—"Do not make yourself uneasy upon the subject. I have certain views for Bragelonne. I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I do not wish him to marry so young. I do not wish him to marry her until she has acquired a fortune; and he, on his side, no less deserves my favour, such as I wish to confer upon him. In a word, Count, I wish them to wait."

"Yet once more, Sire."—"Monsieur the Count, you told me you came to request a favour."—"Assuredly, Sire."—"Grant me one, then, instead,—let us speak no longer upon this matter. It is probable that before long war may be declared; I require men about me who are unfettered. I should hesitate to send under fire a married man or a father of a family; I should hesitate, also, on Bragelonne's account, to endow with a fortune, without some sound reason for it, a young girl, a perfect stranger; such an act would sow jealousy among my nobility."

Athos bowed, and remained silent. "Is that all you had to ask me?" added Louis XIV.—"Absolutely all, Sire; and I take my leave of your Majesty. Is it, however, necessary that I should inform Raoul?"—"Spare yourself the trouble and

annoyance. Tell the viscount that at my *levée* to-morrow morning I will speak to him. I shall expect you this evening, Count, to join my card-table."—"I am in travelling-costume, Sire."

"A day will come, I hope, when you will leave me no more. Before long, Count, the monarchy will be established in such a manner as to enable me to offer a worthy hospitality to all men of your merit."—"Provided, Sire, a monarch reigns truly great in the hearts of his subjects, the palace he inhabits matters little, since he is worshipped in a temple."

With these words Athos left the cabinet, and found Bragelonne, who awaited his return. "Well, Monsieur?" said the young man.—"The king, Raoul, is well disposed towards us both; not, perhaps, in the sense you suppose, but he is kind, and generously disposed towards our house."

"You have bad news to communicate to me, Monsieur," said the young man, turning very pale.—"The king will himself inform you to-morrow morning that it is not bad news."—"The king has not signed, however?"—"The king wishes himself to settle the terms of the contract, Raoul, and he desires to make it so grand that he requires time for it. Throw the blame rather on your own impatience than on the king's goodwill."

Raoul, in utter consternation, because he knew the count's frankness as well as his tact, remained plunged in a dull, heavy stupor. "Will you not go with me to my lodgings?" said Athos.—"I beg your pardon, Monsieur; I will follow you," Raoul stammered out, following Athos down the staircase.

"Since I am here," said Athos, suddenly, "cannot I see M. d'Artagnan?"—"Shall I show you to his apartment?" said Bragelonne.—"Do so."—"It is on the other staircase, then."

They altered their course; but as they reached the landing of the grand gallery, Raoul perceived a servant in the Comte de Guiche's livery, who ran towards him as soon as he heard his voice. "What is it?" said Raoul.—"This note, Monsieur. Monsieur the Count heard of your return, and wrote to you without delay. I have been seeking you for the last hour." Raoul approached Athos as he unsealed the letter, saying, "With your permission, Monsieur."—"Certainly."

"DEAR RAOUL.—I have an affair in hand which requires immediate attention. I know you have returned; come to me as soon as possible. DE GUICHE."

Hardly had he finished reading it, when a servant in the livery of the Duke of Buckingham, turning out of the gallery, recognised Raoul, and approached him respectfully, saying, "From his grace the duke."—"Well, Raoul, as I see you are already as busy as a general of an army, I will leave you, and will find M. d'Artagnan myself."—"You will excuse me, I trust," said Raoul.—"Yes, yes, I excuse you. Adieu, Raoul! You will find me at my apartments until to-morrow; during the day I may set out for Blois, unless I have orders to the contrary."—"I shall present my respects to you to-morrow, Monsieur."

When Athos had left, Raoul opened Buckingham's letter.

"MONSIEUR DE BRAGELONNE,—You are, of all the Frenchmen I have known, the one with whom I am most pleased. I am about to put your friendship to the proof. I have received a certain message, written in very good French. As I am an Englishman, I am afraid of not comprehending it very clearly. The letter has a good name attached to it, and that is all I can tell you. Will you be obliging enough to come and see me, for I am told you have arrived from Blois?—Your devoted

"VILLIERS, *Duke of Buckingham*."

"I am going now to see your master," said Raoul to De Guiche's servant as he dismissed him; "and I shall be with the Duke of Buckingham in an hour," he added, dismissing with these words the duke's messenger.

CHAPTER XCIV

SWORD-THRUSTS IN THE WATER

RAOUL, on betaking himself to De Guiche, found him conversing with De Wardes and Manicamp. De Wardes, since the affair of the barricade, had treated Raoul as a stranger. It might have been imagined that nothing at all had passed between them; they only behaved as if they were not acquainted. As Raoul entered, De Guiche walked up to him; and Raoul, as he grasped his friend's hand, glanced rapidly at his two young companions, hoping to be able to read on their faces what was passing in their minds. De Wardes was cold and impenetrable, and Manicamp seemed absorbed in the contemplation of some trimming to his dress.

De Guiche led Raoul to an adjoining cabinet, and made him

sit down, saying, "How well you look!"—"That is rather strange," replied Raoul, "for I am far from being in good spirits."—"Your case is the same as mine, then, Raoul,—your love-affair is not going well."—"So much the better, Count, so far as you are concerned; the worst news, that which would distress me most of all, would be good news."—"In that case do not distress yourself; for not only am I very unhappy, but, what is more, I see people about me who are happy."—"Really, I do not understand you," replied Raoul, "explain yourself, my friend."

"You will soon learn. I have tried, but in vain, to overcome the feeling which you saw dawn in me, increase in me, and take such entire possession of me. I have summoned all your advice and all my own strength to my aid. I have well considered the unfortunate affair in which I have embarked. I have sounded its depths; that it is an abyss, I am well aware. But it matters little; I shall pursue my own course."—"Madman! you cannot advance another step without inviting ruin to-day, death to-morrow."—"Come what may!"—"De Guiche!"—"I have done with reflections; listen!"

"And you hope to succeed; you believe that Madame will love you?"—"Raoul, I believe nothing; I hope, because hope exists in man, and accompanies him even to the grave."—"But, admitting that you obtain the happiness which you covet, even then you are more certainly lost than if you had not obtained it."—"I beseech you, Raoul, not to interrupt me any more. You could never convince me, for I tell you beforehand that I do not wish to be convinced. I have gone so far that I cannot recede; I have suffered so much that death itself would be a boon. I now not only love to madness, Raoul, I am also in a perfect rage of jealousy."

Raoul struck his hands together with an expression not unlike anger. "Well?" said he.—"Well or ill, it matters little. This is what I claim from you, my friend, my brother. During the last three days Madame has been living in a perfect intoxication of gaiety. On the first day I dared not look at her; I hated her for not being as unhappy as myself. The next day I could not bear to lose sight of her, and she, Raoul,—at least I thought I noticed it,—she looked at me, if not with pity, at least with gentleness. But between her looks and mine a shadow intervened; another's smile invited her smile. Beside her horse another always gallops, which is not mine; in her ear a caressing voice, not mine, unceasingly vibrates. Raoul, for

three days past my brain has been on fire; fire courses through my veins. That shadow must be driven away; that smile must be quenched; that voice must be silenced!"

"You wish Monsieur's death?" exclaimed Raoul.—"No, no! I am not jealous of Monsieur; I am not jealous of the husband, I am jealous of the lover."—"Of the lover?" said Raoul.—"Have you not observed it,—you, who were formerly so keen-sighted?"—"Are you jealous of M. de Buckingham?"—"To the very death!"

"Again jealous?"—"This time the affair will be easy to arrange between us; I have taken the initiative, and have sent him a letter."—"It was you, then, who wrote to him!"—"How do you know that?"—"I know it because he told me so. Look at this!" and he handed to De Guiche the letter which he had received nearly at the same moment as his own.

De Guiche read it eagerly, and said, "He is a brave man; and more than that, a gallant man."—"Most certainly the duke is a gallant man; I need not ask if you wrote to him in as good a style."—"He will show you my letter when you call on him on my behalf."—"But that is almost out of the question."—"What is?"—"That I should call on him for that purpose."—"Why so?"—"The duke consults me as you do."

"Oh! But you will give me the preference, I suppose. Now listen! here is what I beg you to tell his grace,—it is a very simple matter,—to-day, to-morrow, the following day, or any other day he may choose, I wish to meet him at Vincennes."—"Reflect, De Guiche!"—"I thought I had already said that I had reflected."—"The duke is a stranger here; he is on a mission which renders him inviolable—Vincennes is close to the Bastille."—"The consequences concern me."

"But the motive for this meeting? What motive do you wish me to assign?"—"Never fear! He will not ask any. The duke must be as sick of me as I am of him; he must hate me as I hate him. I implore you, therefore, to seek the duke; and if it is necessary to entreat him to accept my proposition, I will do that."—"That is useless. The duke has already informed me that he wishes to speak to me. The duke is now at play with the king. Let us both go there. I will draw him aside in the gallery; you will remain aloof. Two words will be sufficient."—"Very well. I shall take De Wardes to keep me in countenance."—"Why not Manicamp? De Wardes can rejoin us at any time; we can leave him here."

"Yes, that is true."—"He knows nothing?"—"Positively

nothing. You continue still on cool terms, then?"—"Has he not told you anything?"—"No."—"I do not like the man; and as I never liked him, the result is that I am on no worse terms with him to-day than I was yesterday."—"Let us go, then."

The four descended the stairs. De Guiche's carriage was waiting at the door, and took them to the Palais-Royal. As they went along, Raoul was engaged in framing some scheme. The sole depositary of two secrets, he did not despair of concluding some arrangement between the two parties. He knew the influence he exercised over Buckingham, and the ascendency he had acquired over De Guiche; and affairs did not look utterly desperate to him.

On their arrival in the gallery, dazzling with the blaze of light, where the most beautiful and illustrious women of the court moved to and fro, like stars in their atmosphere of light, Raoul could not help forgetting De Guiche for a moment in order to seek out Louise, who amid her companions, like a dove completely fascinated, gazed long and fixedly upon the royal circle, which glittered with jewels and gold. The men were standing, the king alone being seated. Raoul perceived Buckingham, who was standing a few paces from Monsieur, in a group of French and English, who were admiring his haughty carriage and the incomparable magnificence of his costume. Some few of the older courtiers remembered having seen the father, and their remembrance was in no way prejudicial to the son. Buckingham was conversing with Fouquet, who was talking with him of Belle-Isle. "I cannot speak to him at present," said Raoul. —"Wait, then, and choose your opportunity, but finish everything speedily. I am on thorns."

"See! our deliverer approaches," said Raoul, perceiving D'Artagnan, who, magnificently dressed in his new uniform of captain of the musketeers, had just made his victorious entry in the gallery; and he advanced towards D'Artagnan. "The Comte de la Fère has been looking for you, Chevalier," said Raoul.—"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "I have just left him."—"I thought you would have passed a portion of the evening together."—"We have arranged to meet again."

As he answered Raoul, his wandering looks were directed on all sides, as if seeking some one in the crowd or looking for something in the room. Suddenly his gaze became fixed, like that of an eagle which perceives its prey. Raoul followed the direction of his glance, and noticed that De Guiche and D'Artagnan

saluted each other, but he could not distinguish at whom the captain's inquiring and haughty glance was directed. "Chevalier," said Raoul, "there is no one here but yourself who can render me a service."—"What is it, my dear Viscount?"—"It is simply to go and interrupt the Duke of Buckingham, to whom I have a word or two to say; and as the duke is conversing with M. Fouquet, you understand that it would not do for me to break into the middle of the conversation."

"Ah! is M. Fouquet there?" inquired D'Artagnan.—"Do you not see him?—There!"—"Yes, now I do. But do you think I have a better right than you?"—"You are a far more important personage."—"Yes, you're right; I am captain of the musketeers. I have had the post promised me so long, and have enjoyed it for so brief a period that I am always forgetting my dignity."—"You will do me the service, will you not?"

"M. Fouquet—the deuce!"—"Are you not on good terms with him?"—"It is rather he who may not be on good terms with me; however, since it will be necessary that some day or other—"—"Stay! I think he is looking at you; or can it really be—"

"No, no, don't deceive yourself; it is indeed me for whom this honour is intended."—"The opportunity is a good one, then."—"Do you think so?"—"Pray go."—"I am going."

De Guiche had not lost sight of Raoul, who made a sign to him that all was arranged. D'Artagnan walked straight up to the group, and courteously saluted M. Fouquet as well as the others.

"Good-evening, M. d'Artagnan; we were speaking of Belle-Isle-en-Mer," said Fouquet, with that perfect knowledge of the usages of society and of the language of the eyes which it requires half a lifetime thoroughly to acquire, and which some persons notwithstanding all their study never attain.—"Of Belle-Isle-en-Mer? Ah!" said D'Artagnan. "It belongs to you, I believe, M. Fouquet?"—"M. Fouquet has just told me that he had presented it to the king," said Buckingham.

"Do you know Belle-Isle, Chevalier?" inquired Fouquet, of the musketeer.—"I have been there only once," replied D'Artagnan, with readiness and good humour.—"Did you remain there long?"—"Scarcely a day, Monseigneur."—"Did you see much of it?"—"All that could be seen in a day."—"A day amounts to a great deal with an observation as keen as yours," said Fouquet; at which D'Artagnan bowed.

During this Raoul made a sign to Buckingham. "M. Fou-

quet," said Buckingham, "I leave the captain with you; he is more learned than I am in bastions and scarps and counterscarps, and I will join one of my friends, who has just beckoned to me." Saying this, Buckingham disengaged himself from the group, and advanced towards Raoul, stopping for a moment at the table where the queen-mother, the young queen, and the king were playing together. "Now, Raoul," said De Guiche, "there he is; be firm and quick!" Buckingham, after having made some complimentary remark to Madame, continued his way towards Raoul, who advanced to meet him, while De Guiche remained in his place, though he followed him with his eyes. The manœuvre was so arranged that the young men met in an open space which was left vacant between the group of players and the gallery, where were walking some of the graver courtiers, who stopped now and then to converse. But at the moment when the two lines were about to unite, they were broken by a third. It was Monsieur, who advanced towards the Duke of Buckingham. Monsieur had his most engaging smile on his red and perfumed lips. "My dear Duke," said he, with the most affectionate politeness, "is it true what I have just been told?"

Buckingham turned round; he had not noticed Monsieur approach, but had merely heard his voice. He started, in spite of himself, and a slight pallor overspread his face. "Monseigneur," he asked, "what have they told your Highness that astonishes you so much?"—"That which throws me into despair, and will in truth be a real cause of mourning for the whole court."—"Your Highness is very kind, for I perceive that you allude to my departure."—"Precisely."—"Alas, Monseigneur, having been in Paris scarcely five or six days, my departure can be a source of grief only to myself." De Guiche had overheard the conversation from where he was standing, and started in his turn. "His departure!" he murmured. "What is he saying?"

Philip continued with the same gracious air: "I can easily conceive, Monsieur, why the King of Great Britain recalls you; we all know that King Charles II., who appreciates true gentlemen, cannot dispense with you. But it cannot be supposed that we can let you go without great regret, and I beg you to receive the expression of my own."—"Believe me, Monseigneur," said the duke, "that if I leave the court of France—"—"It is because you are recalled, I understand that; but if you think that the expression of my own wish on the subject may have some weight

with the king, I will gladly volunteer to entreat his Majesty Charles II. to leave you with us a little while longer."

"I am overwhelmed, Monseigneur, by so much kindness," replied Buckingham; "but I have received positive commands. My stay in France was limited; I have prolonged it at the risk of displeasing my gracious sovereign. It is only this very day that I recollected I ought to have set off four days ago."—"Indeed," said Monsieur.—"Yes; but," added Buckingham, raising his voice in such a manner that the princess could hear him,—"but I resemble that dweller in the East, who went mad, and remained so for several days, owing to a delightful dream that he had had, and who one day awoke, if not completely cured, in some respects rational at least. The court of France has its intoxicating properties, which are not unlike this dream, my Lord; but at last I wake and leave it. I shall be unable, therefore, to prolong my stay as your Highness has so kindly invited me."

"When do you leave?" inquired Philip, with an expression full of interest.—"To-morrow, Monseigneur. My carriages have been ready for three days past." The Duc d'Orléans made a movement of the head, which seemed to signify, "Since you are determined, Duke, there is nothing to be said."

Buckingham raised his eyes to the princesses; his glance met that of Anne of Austria, who thanked him and showed her approval by a gesture. Buckingham returned the gesture, concealing under a smile his heart's anguish; and then Monsieur moved away in the same direction by which he had approached. At the same moment, however, De Guiche advanced from the opposite side. Raoul feared that the impatient young man was coming to make the proposition himself, and hurried forward before him.

"No, no, Raoul; all is useless now," said De Guiche, holding both his hands towards the duke, and leading him behind a column. "Oh, Duke, Duke!" said he, "forgive me for what I wrote to you! I was mad; give me back my letter!"—"It is true," replied the young duke, with a melancholy smile, "that you cannot owe me a grudge any longer now."—"Forgive me, Duke; my friendship, my lasting friendship, is yours."—"Why indeed, Count, should you bear me any ill-will from the moment I leave her never to see her again?"

Raoul heard these words, and comprehending that his presence was useless between the two young men, who had now only friendly words to exchange, withdrew a few paces,—a movement

which brought him closer to De Wardes, who was conversing with the Chevalier de Lorraine respecting the departure of Buckingham. "A wise retreat," said De Wardes.—"Why so?"—"Because the dear duke saves a sword-thrust by it;" and both began to laugh.

Raoul, indignant, turned round with brow contracted, flushed with anger, and his lip curling with disdain. The Chevalier de Lorraine turned away upon his heel, but De Wardes remained firm and waited. "Will you never break yourself of the habit of insulting the absent?" said Raoul to De Wardes. "Yesterday it was M. d'Artagnan; to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham."—"You know very well, Monsieur," returned De Wardes, "that I sometimes insult those who are present."

De Wardes touched Raoul; their shoulders met, their faces were bent towards each other, as if to be mutually inflamed by the fire of their breath and of their anger. It could be seen that the one was at the height of his anger, the other at the end of his patience. Suddenly a voice was heard behind them full of grace and courtesy, saying, "I believe I heard my name pronounced." They turned round and saw D'Artagnan, who with a smiling eye and a cheerful face had just placed his hand on De Wardes's shoulder. Raoul stepped back to make room for the musketeer. De Wardes trembled from head to foot, turned pale, but did not move. D'Artagnan, still with the same smile, took the place which Raoul abandoned to him. "Thank you, my dear Raoul," he said. "M. de Wardes, I wish to talk with you. Do not leave us, Raoul; every one can hear what I have to say to M. de Wardes." Then his smile faded away, and his glance became cold and sharp as a steel blade.

"I am at your orders, Monsieur," said De Wardes.—"For a very long time, Monsieur," resumed D'Artagnan, "I have sought an opportunity of conversing with you; to-day is the first time I have found it. The place is badly chosen, I admit; but if you will take the trouble to come to my apartments, which are on the staircase at the end of this gallery—"—"I will follow you, Monsieur," said De Wardes.—"Are you alone here?" said D'Artagnan.—"No; I have M. Manicamp and M. de Guiche, two of my friends."

"That is well," said D'Artagnan. "But two persons are not sufficient; you will be able to find a few others, I trust."—"Certainly," said the young man, who did not know the object which D'Artagnan had in view. "As many as you please."—"Friends?"—"Yes, Monsieur."—"Real friends?"—"No

doubt of it."—"Very well; get a good supply, then. Do you come too, Raoul; bring M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham, if you please."

"What an ado!" replied De Wardes, attempting to smile. The captain made him a slight sign with his hand, as though to recommend him to be patient. "I never get excited," said he. "Well, then, I shall expect you, Monsieur."—"I will be there."—"Till then, *au revoir!*" and he led the way to his apartments.

D'Artagnan's apartment was not unoccupied: the Comte de la Fère, seated in the recess of a window, awaited him. "Well," said he to D'Artagnan, as he saw him enter.—"Well," said the latter, "M. de Wardes has done me the honour to pay me a visit, in company with some of his own friends as well as of ours." In fact, behind the musketeer appeared De Wardes and Manicamp, followed by De Guiche and Buckingham, who looked surprised, not knowing what was expected of them. Raoul was accompanied by two or three gentlemen; and as he entered, he looked all around the room, and perceiving the count, went and placed himself by his side. D'Artagnan received his visitors with all the courtesy of which he was capable; he preserved his unmoved and unruffled look. All the persons present were men of distinction, occupying positions at court. After he had apologised to each of them for any inconvenience he might have caused them, D'Artagnan turned towards De Wardes, who, in spite of his great self-command, could not prevent his face from betraying some surprise mingled with uneasiness.

"Now, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "since we are no longer within the precincts of the king's palace, and since we can speak out without failing in respect to propriety, I will inform you why I have taken the liberty to request you to visit me here, and why I have invited these gentlemen to be present at the same time. My friend, the Comte de la Fère, has acquainted me with the injurious reports you are spreading about myself. You have stated that you regard me as your mortal enemy, because I was, so you affirm, that of your father."—"Perfectly true, Monsieur; I have said so," replied De Wardes, whose pallid face became slightly tinged with colour.

"You accuse me, therefore, of a crime, or of a fault, or of some mean and cowardly act. Have the goodness to state your charge against me in precise terms."—"In the presence of witnesses?"—"Most certainly in the presence of witnesses; and you see I have selected them as being experienced in affairs of honour."—"You do not appreciate my delicacy, Monsieur. I

have accused you, it is true; but I have kept the nature of the accusation a secret. I have not entered into any details, but have contented myself with expressing my hatred in the presence of those on whom a duty was almost imposed to acquaint you with it. You have not taken into consideration the discreetness I have shown, although you were interested in my remaining silent. I can hardly recognise your customary prudence in that, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan, who was gnawing the end of his moustache, said, "I have already had the honour to beg you to set forth the grievances you have against me."—"Aloud?"—"Certainly, aloud."—"In that case I will speak."—"Speak, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, bowing; "we are all listening to you."—"Well, Monsieur, it is not a question of an injury towards myself, but of one towards my father."—"That you have already stated."—"Yes; but there are certain subjects which are only approached with great hesitation."

"If that hesitation in your case really does exist, I entreat you to overcome it."—"Even if it refer to a disgraceful action?"—"Yes; in every and any case." The witnesses of this scene had at first looked at one another with a good deal of uneasiness. They were reassured, however, when they saw that the face of D'Artagnan manifested no emotion whatever. De Wardes still kept silence. "Speak, Monsieur!" said the musketeer; "you see that you are keeping us waiting."

"Listen, then! My father loved a woman of noble birth, and this woman loved my father." D'Artagnan and Athos exchanged looks. De Wardes continued: "M. d'Artagnan intercepted some letters which indicated an assignation, substituted himself under a disguise for the person who was expected, and took advantage of the darkness."—"That is true," said D'Artagnan.

A slight murmur was heard from those present. "Yes, I was guilty of that dishonourable action. You should have added, Monsieur, since you are so impartial, that at the period when the circumstance with which you reproach me happened, I was not one-and-twenty years of age."—"The action is not the less shameful on that account," said De Wardes; "and it is quite sufficient for a gentleman to have attained the age of reason, to avoid committing any act of indelicacy."

A renewed murmur was heard, but this time of astonishment and almost of doubt. "It was a most shameful deception, I admit," said D'Artagnan, "and I have not waited for M. de

Wardes's reproaches to reproach myself for it, and very bitterly too. Age has made me more reasonable, and above all more upright, and this injury has been atoned for by lasting regret. But I appeal to you, gentlemen; this affair took place in 1626, at a period happily for yourselves known to you by tradition only, at a period when love was not over-scrupulous, when consciences did not distil, as in the present day, poison and bitterness. We were young soldiers, always fighting or being attacked, our swords always out of the scabbard or at least half drawn. Death then always stared us in the face, war hardened us, and the cardinal pressed us sorely. In short, I have repented of it; and more than that,—I still repent it, M. de Wardes."—"I can well understand that, Monsieur, for the action itself needed repentance; but you were not the less the cause of that lady's disgrace. She of whom you have been speaking, covered with shame, borne down by the affront she had received, fled, quitted France, and no one ever knew what became of her."

"Stay!" said the Comte de la Fère, stretching his hand towards De Wardes with a sinister smile; "you are mistaken. She was seen; and there are persons even now present who, having often heard her spoken of, will easily recognise her by the description I am about to give. She was about five-and-twenty years of age, slender in form, of a pale complexion, and fair-haired; she was married in England."—"Married?" exclaimed De Wardes.—"So you were not aware that she was married? You see we are far better informed than yourself, M. de Wardes. Do you happen to know that she was usually styled 'Milady,' without the addition of any name to that title?"

"Yes, I know that."—"Good heavens!" murmured Buckingham.—"Very well, Monsieur. That woman, who came from England, returned to England after having thrice attempted M. d'Artagnan's life. That was but just, you will say, since M. d'Artagnan had insulted her. But that which was not just was that this woman, when in England, by her seductions completely enslaved a young man in the service of Lord Winter, by the name of Felton. You change colour, my Lord Buckingham, and your eyes kindle with anger and sorrow. Let your Grace finish the recital, then, and tell M. de Wardes who that woman was who placed the knife in the hand of your father's murderer."

A cry escaped from the lips of all present. The young duke passed his handkerchief across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. A dead silence ensued among the spectators.

"You see, M. de Wardes," said D'Artagnan, whom this recital had impressed more and more, as his own recollection revived while Athos was speaking,—"you see that my crime did not cause the destruction of a soul, and that the soul in question was altogether lost before my offence. It is, however, a matter of conscience on my part. Now that this matter is settled, therefore, it remains for me, M. de Wardes, to ask with the greatest humility your forgiveness for this shameless deed, as most certainly I should have asked it of your father if he were still alive, and if I had met him after my return to France, subsequent to the death of King Charles I."

"That is too much, M. d'Artagnan," exclaimed many voices, with animation.—"No, gentlemen," said the captain. "And now, M. de Wardes, I hope that all is finished between us, and that you will have no further occasion to speak ill of me. Do you consider the matter cleared up?" De Wardes bowed, stammering his excuses.

"I trust, also," said D'Artagnan, approaching the young man closely, "that you will no longer speak ill of any one, as you have the unpleasant habit of doing; for a man so puritanically conscientious as you are, who can reproach an old soldier for a youthful freak five-and-thirty years after it has happened,—you, I say, who advocate such purity of conscience, will undertake on your side to do nothing contrary either to conscience or to the principles of honour. And now listen attentively to what I am going to say, M. de Wardes, in conclusion. Take care that no tale with which your name may be associated reaches my ear!" —"Monsieur," said De Wardes, "it is useless threatening to no purpose."—"I have not yet finished, M. de Wardes," replied D'Artagnan, "and you must listen to me still further." The circle of listeners, full of eager curiosity, drew closer together. "You spoke just now of the honour of a woman and of the honour of your father. We were glad to hear you speak in that manner; for it is pleasing to think that such a sentiment of delicacy and rectitude, which did not exist, it seems, in our minds, lives in those of our children; and it is delightful, too, to see a young man at an age when men from habit become the destroyers of the honour of women respect and defend it."

De Wardes bit his lips and clinched his hands, evidently much disturbed to learn how this discourse, the beginning of which was announced in so threatening a manner, would terminate. "How did it happen, then," continued D'Artagnan, "that you

allowed yourself to say to M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne that he did not know who his mother was?"

Raoul's eye flashed, as darting forward he exclaimed, "Monsieur the Chevalier, this is a personal affair of my own!" at which exclamation De Wardes smiled maliciously. D'Artagnan put Raoul aside, saying, "Do not interrupt me, young man!" and looking at De Wardes in an authoritative manner, he continued: "I am now dealing with a matter which cannot be settled by means of the sword. I discuss it before men of honour, all of whom have more than once had their swords in their hands in affairs of honour. I selected them expressly. These gentlemen well know that every secret for which men fight ceases to be a secret. I again put my question to M. de Wardes: What was the subject of conversation when you offended this young man in offending his father and mother at the same time?"

"It seems to me," returned De Wardes, "that liberty of speech is allowed when it is ready to be supported by every means which a man of courage has at his disposal."—"Ah, Monsieur, tell me what the means are by which a man of courage can sustain a slanderous expression."—"The sword."—"You fail in your argument, not only in logic, but in religion and honour. You expose the lives of many others, without referring to your own, which seems to be much exposed to danger. Besides, fashions pass away, Monsieur; and the fashion of duelling has passed away, without referring in any way to the edicts of his Majesty which forbid it. Therefore, in order to be consistent with your own chivalrous notions, you will at once apologise to M. Raoul de Bragelonne; you will tell him how much you regret having spoken so lightly, and that the nobility and purity of his race are inscribed not in his heart alone, but still more in every action of his life. You will do this, M. de Wardes, as I, an old officer, did it just now to your boy's moustache."

"And if I refuse?" inquired De Wardes.—"In that case the result will be—"—"That which you think you will prevent," said De Wardes, laughing; "the result will be that your plan of conciliation will end in a violation of the king's prohibition."—"Not so," said the captain, quietly; "you are quite mistaken."

"What will be the result, then?"—"The result will be that I shall go to the king, with whom I am on tolerably good terms, to whom I have been happy enough to render certain services dating from a period when you were not born, and who at my

request has just sent me an order in blank for M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor of the Bastille; and I shall say to the king, 'Sire, a man has in a cowardly manner insulted M. de Bragelonne, in the person of his mother; I have written this man's name upon the *lettre de cachet* which your Majesty has been kind enough to give me, so that M. de Wardes is in the Bastille for three years.'" And D'Artagnan, drawing from his pocket the order signed by the king, held it towards De Wardes; then, seeing that the young man was not quite convinced and received the warning as an idle threat, he shrugged his shoulders, and walked leisurely towards the table, upon which lay a writing-case and a pen, the length of which would have appalled the topographer Porthos.

De Wardes then saw that nothing could well be more seriously intended than the threat in question, for the Bastille even at that period was already held in dread. He advanced a step towards Raoul, and in an almost unintelligible voice, said, "I offer my apologies in the terms which M. d'Artagnan just now dictated, and which I am forced to make to you."—"One moment, Monsieur," said the musketeer, with the greatest tranquillity; "you mistake the terms of the apology. I did not say, 'and which I am forced to make;' I said, 'and which my conscience induces me to make.' This latter expression, believe me, is better than the former; and it will be far preferable, since it will be the most truthful expression of your own sentiments."—"I subscribe to it, then," said De Wardes; "but really, gentlemen, you must admit that a sword-thrust through the body, as was the custom formerly, was far better than tyranny like this."

"No, Monsieur," replied Buckingham; "for the sword-thrust, when received, was no indication that a particular person was right or wrong,—it only showed that he was more or less skilful."—"Monsieur!" exclaimed De Wardes.—"There now," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you are going to say something very rude, and I am rendering you a service in stopping you in time."—"Is that all, Monsieur?" inquired De Wardes.—"Absolutely everything," replied D'Artagnan; "and these gentlemen, as well as myself, are quite satisfied with you."

"Believe me, Monsieur," rejoined De Wardes, "that your reconciliations are not successful."—"In what way?"—"Because, as we are now about to separate, I would wager that M. de Bragelonne and myself are greater enemies than ever."—"You are deceived, Monsieur, so far as I am concerned,"

returned Raoul; "for I do not retain the slightest animosity in my heart against you."

This last blow overwhelmed De Wardes; he cast his eyes around him like a man utterly bewildered. D'Artagnan saluted most courteously the gentlemen who had been present at the explanation, and every one, on leaving the room, shook hands with him; but not one hand was held out towards De Wardes. "Oh!" exclaimed the young man, abandoning himself to the rage which consumed him, "can I not find some one on whom to wreak my vengeance?"—"You can, Monsieur, for I am here!" whispered a voice full of menace in his ear.

De Wardes turned round, and saw the Duke of Buckingham, who having probably remained behind with that intention had just approached him. "You, Monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.—"Yes, I! I am no subject of the King of France; I am not going to remain on the territory, since I am about setting off for England. I have accumulated in my heart such a mass of despair and rage that I too, like yourself, need to revenge myself upon some one. I approve M. d'Artagnan's principles extremely, but I am not bound to apply them to you. I am an Englishman, and in my turn I propose to you what you proposed to others to no purpose. Since you, therefore, my dear M. de Wardes, are so terribly incensed, take me for an object of attack. In thirty-four hours' time I shall be at Calais. Come with me; the journey will appear shorter with company than if taken alone. We will draw our swords when we get there, upon the sands which are covered by the rising tide, and which form part of the French territory during six hours of the daytime, but belong to the territory of Heaven during the other six."

"Very well," replied De Wardes, "I accept."—"I assure you," said the duke, "that if you kill me you will be rendering me an infinite service."—"I will do my utmost to be agreeable to you, Duke," said De Wardes.—"It is agreed, then, that I carry you off with me?"—"I shall be at your commands. I require some real danger and some mortal risk to tranquillise me."—"In that case I think you have met with what you are looking for. Farewell, M. de Wardes; to-morrow morning my valet will tell you the exact hour of departure. We will travel together like two excellent friends. I generally travel as fast as I can. Adieu!"

Buckingham saluted De Wardes, and returned to the king's apartments. De Wardes, irritated beyond measure, left the Palais-Royal, and hurried through the streets homeward to the house where he lodged.

CHAPTER XCV

BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN

After the rather severe lesson administered to De Wardes, Athos and D'Artagnan together descended the staircase which led to the courtyard of the Palais-Royal.

"You perceive," said Athos to D'Artagnan, "that Raoul cannot, sooner or later, avoid a duel with De Wardes; for De Wardes is as brave as he is vicious and wicked."—"I know these fellows well," replied D'Artagnan; "I have had an affair with the father. I assure you that although at that time I had good muscles and a sort of brute courage,—I assure you that the father did me some mischief. But you should have seen how I fought it out with him,—ah, my friend, such encounters never take place in these times! I had a hand which could never remain at rest,—a hand like quicksilver; you knew its quality, Athos, for you have seen me at work. My sword was no longer a piece of steel; it was a serpent which assumed every form and every length, seeking where it might thrust its head,—in other words, where it might fix its bite. I advanced half-a-dozen feet, then three, and then body to body. I pressed my antagonist closely; then I darted back again ten feet. No human power could resist that ferocious ardour. Well, De Wardes, the father, with the bravery of his race, with his dogged courage, kept me busy a long time; and my fingers at the end of the engagement were, I well remember, tired enough."

"It is, then, as I said," resumed Athos: "the son will always be looking out for Raoul, and will end by meeting him; and Raoul can easily be found when he is sought for."—"Agreed. But Raoul calculates well; he bears no grudge against De Wardes,—he has said so; he will wait until he is provoked, and in that case his position is a good one. The king cannot take offence; besides, we shall know how to pacify his Majesty. But why are you so full of these fears and anxieties? You are not easily alarmed."

"I will tell you what makes me anxious. Raoul is to see the king to-morrow, when his Majesty will inform him of his wishes respecting a certain marriage. Raoul, loving as he does, will get out of temper; and once in an angry mood, if he were to meet De Wardes, the shell would explode."—"We will prevent the explosion, my friend."—"Not I," said Athos, "for I must

return to Blois. All this gilded elegance of the court, all these intrigues, disgust me. I am no longer a young man who can accustom himself to the meannesses of the present day. I have read in the great Book of God many things too beautiful and too great to take any interest in the trifling phrases which these men whisper among themselves when they wish to deceive others. In a word, I am sick of Paris wherever and whenever you are not with me; and as I cannot have you always, I wish to return to Blois."

"How wrong you are, Athos,—how you gainsay your origin and the destiny of your nature! Men of your stamp are created to continue to the very last moment in full possession of their faculties. Look at my old sword, a Spanish blade, the one I wore at Rochelle; it served me for thirty years without fail. One day in the winter it fell upon the marble floor of the Louvre and broke off short. I had a hunting-knife made of it which will last a hundred years yet. You, Athos, with your loyalty, your frankness, your cool courage, and your sound information, are the very man kings need to warn and direct them. Remain here; M. Fouquet will not last so long as my Spanish blade."

"Is it possible," said Athos, smilingly, "that my friend D'Artagnan, after having raised me to the skies, making me an object of worship, casts me down from the top of Olympus, and hurls me to the ground? I have a more exalted ambition, D'Artagnan. To be a minister, to be a slave, never! Am I not still greater? I am nothing. I remember having heard you occasionally call me 'the great Athos'; I defy you, therefore, if I were minister, to continue to bestow that title upon me. No, no; I do not yield myself in this manner."—"We will not speak of it any more, then; renounce everything, even the brotherly feeling which unites us."—"Oh, my dear friend, what you say is almost cruel!"

D'Artagnan pressed Athos's hand warmly. "No, no; renounce everything without fear. Raoul can get on without you; I am at Paris."—"Well, then, I shall return to Blois. We will take leave of each other to-night; to-morrow at daybreak I shall be on my horse again."

"You cannot return to your hotel alone; why did you not bring Grimaud with you?"—"Grimaud is asleep; he goes to bed early, for my poor old servant gets easily fatigued. He came from Blois with me, and I compelled him to remain within doors; but if it were necessary to retrace the forty leagues which separate us from Blois without taking breath, he would die in

the attempt without a murmur. But I don't wish to lose Grimaud."

"You shall have one of my musketeers to carry a torch for you. Holloa! some one there," called out D'Artagnan, leaning over the gilded balustrade,—the heads of seven or eight musketeers appeared,—"I wish some gentleman who is so disposed to escort the Comte de la Fère," cried D'Artagnan.—"Thank you for your readiness, gentlemen," said Athos; "I regret to have occasion to trouble you in this manner."

"I would willingly escort the Comte de la Fère," said some one, "if I had not to speak to M. d'Artagnan."—"Who is that?" said D'Artagnan, looking into the darkness.—"I, M. d'Artagnan."—"Heaven forgive me, if that is not M. Baisemeaux's voice!"

"It is, Monsieur."—"What are you doing there in the courtyard, my dear Baisemeaux?"—"I am waiting your orders, my dear M. d'Artagnan."—"Wretch that I am!" said D'Artagnan; "true, you have been told, I suppose, that some one was to be arrested, and have come yourself, instead of sending an officer?"—"I came because I had occasion to speak to you."—"You did not send to me?"—"I waited until you were disengaged," said M. Baisemeaux, timidly.—"I must leave you, D'Artagnan," said Athos to his friend.—"Not before I have presented M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, the governor of the Bastille."

Baisemeaux and Athos saluted each other. "Surely you must know each other," added D'Artagnan.—"I have an indistinct recollection of M. Baisemeaux," said Athos.—"My dear friend, you remember Baisemeaux, that king's guardsman with whom we used formerly to have such delightful meetings in the cardinal's time."—"Perfectly," said Athos, taking leave of him with affability.

"M. le Comte de la Fère, whose *nom de guerre* was Athos," whispered D'Artagnan to Baisemeaux.—"Yes, yes; a brave man, one of the famous four."—"Precisely so. But, my dear Baisemeaux, shall we talk now?"—"If you please."

"In the first place, as for the orders, there are none. The king has decided not to arrest the person in question."—"So much the worse," said Baisemeaux, with a sigh.—"What do you mean by 'so much the worse'?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, laughing.—"No doubt of it," returned the governor of the Bastille; "my prisoners are my income."—"I beg your pardon, I did not see it in that light."

"And so there are no orders," repeated Baisemeaux, with a

sigh. "What an admirable situation yours is, Captain," he continued, after a pause,—"captain-lieutenant of the musketeers!"—"Oh, it is good enough; but I don't see why you should envy me,—you, governor of the Bastille, the first castle in France."—"I am well aware of that," said Baisemeaux, in a sorrowful tone of voice.

"You say that like a man confessing his sins. I would willingly exchange my profits for yours."—"Don't speak of profits to me, if you wish to save me the bitterest anguish."

"Why do you look first on one side and then on the other, as if you were afraid of being arrested yourself,—you whose business it is to arrest and guard others?"—"I was looking to see whether any one could see or listen to us; it would be safer to confer more in private, if you would grant me such a favour."—"Baisemeaux, you seem to forget that we are acquaintances of five-and-thirty years' standing. Don't assume such sanctified airs; make yourself quite comfortable! I don't eat governors of the Bastille raw."—"Heaven be praised!"

"Come into the courtyard with me; it's a beautiful moonlight night. We will walk up and down, arm in arm, under the trees, while you tell me your mournful tale. Come!" He drew the doleful governor into the courtyard, took him by the arm as he had said, and in his rough, good-humoured way, cried: "Out with it! rattle away, Baisemeaux! what have you got to say?"—"It's a long story."—"You prefer your own lamentations, then; my opinion is, it will be longer than ever. I'll wager you are making fifty thousand livres out of your pigeons in the Bastille."—"Would to Heaven that were so, M. d'Artagnan!"

"You surprise me, Baisemeaux. Just look at yourself; you are the picture of melancholy. I should like to lead you before a glass, and you would see how plump and florid-looking you are, as fat and round as a cheese, with eyes like lighted coals; and if it were not for that ugly wrinkle you try to cultivate on your forehead, you would look hardly fifty years old, and you are sixty, if I am not mistaken."—"All quite true."—"Of course I knew it was true, as true as the fifty thousand livres' profit you make." At this remark Baisemeaux stamped his foot.

"There, there," said D'Artagnan, "I will run up your account for you: you were captain of M. de Mazarin's guards,—twelve thousand livres a year; you received that for twelve years,—total, one hundred and forty-four thousand livres."—"Twelve

thousand livres! Are you mad?" cried Baisemeaux; "the old miser gave me no more than six thousand, and the expenses of the post amounted to sixty-five hundred. M. Colbert, who deducted the other six thousand livres, condescended to allow me to take fifty pistoles as a gratification; so that, if it were not for my little estate at Montlezun, which brings me in twelve thousand livres a year, I could not have met my obligations."

"I will not insist on your convicting yourself; but how about the fifty thousand livres from the Bastille? There, I trust, you are boarded and lodged, and get your six thousand livres' salary."—"Admitted!"—"Whether the year be good or bad, there are fifty prisoners, who on an average bring you in a thousand livres a year each."—"I don't deny it."—"Well, there is an income of fifty thousand livres; you have held the post three years, and must have received in that time one hundred and fifty thousand livres."

"You forget one circumstance, dear M. d'Artagnan."—"What is that?"—"That while you received your appointment as captain from the king's hands, I received mine as governor from Messieurs Tremblay and Louvière."

"Quite right; and Tremblay was not a man to let you have the post for nothing."—"Nor was Louvière, either; the result was that I gave seventy-five thousand livres to Tremblay as his share."—"Very agreeable that! and to Louvière?"—"The same."—"Money down?"—"No; that would have been impossible. The king did not wish, or rather M. de Mazarin did not wish, to have the appearance of removing those two precious sports, sprung from the barricades; he permitted them, therefore, to make certain extravagant conditions for their retirement."

"What were those conditions?"—"Frightful!—three years' income as a bonus."—"The deuce! so that the one hundred and fifty thousand livres have passed into their hands."—"Precisely so."—"And beyond that?"—"A sum of one hundred and fifty thousand crowns, or fifteen thousand pistoles, whichever you please, in three payments."

"Exorbitant enough."—"Yes; but that is not all."—"What besides?"—"In default of the fulfilment by me of any one of those conditions, those gentlemen enter upon their functions again. The king has been induced to sign that."—"It is enormous, incredible!"—"Such is the fact, however."—"I do indeed pity you, my poor Baisemeaux! But why, in the

name of fortune, did M. de Mazarin grant you this pretended favour? It would have been more simple to refuse you altogether."—"Certainly, but he was forced to do so by my patron."—"Your patron! Who is that?"—"One of your own friends, indeed; M. d'Herblay."—"M. d'Herblay! Aramis!"—"Just so; he has been very kind to me."—"Kind! to make you enter into such a bargain!"

"Listen! I wished to leave the cardinal's service. M. d'Herblay spoke on my behalf to Louvière and Tremblay; they objected. I wished to have the appointment very much, for I knew what it could be made to produce; in my distress I confided in M. d'Herblay, and he offered to become my surety for each payment."—"Aramis? You astound me! Aramis become your surety?"—"Like a man of honour. He procured the signature: Tremblay and Louvière resigned their appointments. I have to pay every year twenty-five thousand livres to one of those two gentlemen; every year, too, in May, M. d'Herblay himself comes to the Bastille, and brings me twenty-five hundred pistoles to distribute to my crocodiles."

"You owe Aramis one hundred and fifty thousand livres, then?"—"Alas, that is why I am in despair, for I owe him only one hundred thousand."—"I don't quite understand you."—"He has come only two years. To-day, however, is the thirty-first of May, and he has not come yet, and to-morrow, at midday, the payment falls due; if therefore I don't pay to-morrow, those gentlemen can, by the terms of the contract, break off the bargain. I shall be stripped of everything; I shall have worked for three years, and given two hundred and fifty thousand livres for nothing, absolutely for nothing at all, dear M. d'Artagnan."—"This is very strange," murmured D'Artagnan.

"You can now imagine that I may well have wrinkles on my forehead, can you not?"—"Yes, indeed!"—"And you can imagine, too, that notwithstanding I may be as round as a cheese, with a complexion like an apple, and my eyes like coals on fire, I may almost be afraid that I shall not have a cheese or an apple left me to eat, and that I shall have only my eyes left me to weep with."—"This is disheartening."

"I have come to you, M. d'Artagnan, for you are the only one who can get me out of my trouble."—"In what way?"—"You are acquainted with the Abbé d'Herblay, and you know that he is somewhat mysterious."—"Yes, yes."—"Well, you can perhaps give me the address of his presbytery; for I have been to Noisy-le-Sec, and he is no longer there."—"I should

think not, indeed. He is bishop of Vannes."—"What! Vannes in Bretagne?"—"Yes."

The little man began to tear his hair, saying, "How can I get to Vannes from here by midday to-morrow? I am a lost man."—"Your despair quite distresses me."—"Vannes, Vannes!" cried Baisemeaux.

"But, listen! A bishop is not always a resident. M. d'Herblay may possibly not be so far away as you fear."—"O, tell me his address!"—"I really don't know it, my friend."—"In that case I am utterly lost. I will go and throw myself at the king's feet."

"But, Baisemeaux, you astonish me; why, since the Bastille is capable of producing fifty thousand livres a year, have you not tried to screw one hundred thousand out of it?"—"Because I am an honest man, M. d'Artagnan, and because my prisoners are fed like potentates."—"Well, you are in a fair way to get out of your difficulties; give yourself a good attack of indigestion with your high living, and die of a surfeit between now and midday to-morrow."

"How can you be cruel enough to laugh?"—"Nay, you really distress me. Come, Baisemeaux, if you can pledge me your word of honour, do so, that you will not open your lips to any one about what I am going to say to you."—"Never, never!"

"You wish to put your hand on Aramis?"—"At any cost."—"Well, go and find M. Fouquet."—"What connection—"—"Ninny that you are! Don't you know that Vannes is in the diocese of Belle-Isle, or that Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes? Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet, and M. Fouquet nominated M. d'Herblay to that bishopric."

"I see, I see; you restore me to life again."—"So much the better. Now go and tell M. Fouquet very simply that you wish to speak to M. d'Herblay."—"Of course, of course," said Baisemeaux, eagerly.

"But," said D'Artagnan, checking him by a severe look, "your word of honour?"—"My sacred word of honour," replied the little man, about to set off running.

"Where are you going?"—"To M. Fouquet's house."—"Don't do that; M. Fouquet is playing at cards with the king. All you can do is to pay M. Fouquet a visit early to-morrow morning."—"I will do so. Thank you."—"Good luck attend you!" said D'Artagnan.

"Thank you."—"This is a strange affair," murmured

D'Artagnan, as he slowly ascended the staircase after he had left Baisemeaux. "What possible interest can Aramis have in obliging Baisemeaux in this manner? Well, I suppose we shall learn some day or other."

CHAPTER XCVI

THE KING'S CARD-TABLE

FOUQUET was present, as D'Artagnan had said, at the king's card-table. It seemed as if Buckingham's departure had shed a balm upon all the ulcerated hearts of the previous evening. Monsieur, radiant with delight, made a thousand affectionate signs to his mother. The Comte de Guiche could not separate himself from Buckingham, and while playing conversed with him upon the circumstances of his projected voyage. Buckingham, thoughtful and kind, like a man who has adopted a resolution, listened to the count, and from time to time cast a look full of regret and hopeless love at Madame, who in her elation of spirits divided her attention between the king, who was playing with her, Monsieur, who quietly joked her about her enormous winnings, and De Guiche, who exhibited an extravagant delight. Of Buckingham she took but little notice; for her, this fugitive, this exile, was now simply a remembrance, and no longer a man.

Light hearts are thus constituted; while they themselves continue untouched, they roughly break off with every one who may possibly interfere with their little plans of selfish comfort. Madame had received Buckingham's smiles and attentions and sighs while he was present; but what was the good of sighing, smiling, and kneeling at a distance? Can one tell in what direction the winds in the channel, which toss the mighty vessels to and fro, carry such sighs as these? The duke could not help noticing this change, and his heart was cruelly hurt by it. Of a sensitive character, proud, and susceptible of deep attachment, he cursed the day on which the passion had entered his heart. The glances which he bestowed upon Madame became colder as his thoughts grew cold. He could hardly yet rise above his trouble, but he was strong enough to impose silence upon the tumultuous outcries of his heart. In exact proportion, however, as Madame suspected this change of feeling, she increased her activity to regain the light which she was about

to lose; her wit, timid and wavering at first, was displayed in brilliant flashes: at any cost, she felt that she must be observed above everything and every one, even above the king himself. And she was so: for the queens, notwithstanding their dignity, and the king, despite the respect which etiquette required, were all eclipsed by her. The queens, stately and ceremonious, were softened from the very first, and could not restrain their laughter. Madame Henrietta, the queen-mother, was dazzled by the brilliancy which cast distinction upon her family, thanks to the wit of the granddaughter of Henry IV. The king so jealous, as a young man and as a monarch, of the superiority of all those who surrounded him, could not help admitting himself vanquished by that petulance which was so thoroughly French in its nature, and whose energy was more than ever increased by its English humour. Like a child, he was captivated by her radiant beauty, which her wit enhanced. Madame's eyes flashed like lightning. Mirth escaped from her ruby lips, like persuasion from the lips of Nestor of old. The whole court, submissive to her enchanting grace, noticed for the first time that laughter could be indulged in before the greatest monarch in the world by the people worthy to be called the wittiest and most polished in the world.

Madame from that evening enjoyed a success capable of bewildering any one who had not been born in those elevated regions which surround a throne, and which in spite of their elevation are proof against such giddiness. From that very moment Louis XIV. acknowledged Madame as an important personage. Buckingham regarded her as a coquette deserving the cruellest tortures, De Guiche looked upon her as a divinity, and the courtiers as a star whose light might become the focus of all favour and power. And yet Louis XIV., a few years before, had not even condescended to offer his hand to that "ugly creature" for a ballet; and Buckingham had worshipped this coquette on his knees, while De Guiche had looked upon this divinity as a mere woman; and the courtiers had not dared to extol this star in her upward progress, fearful to displease the monarch whom this star had formerly displeased.

Let us see what was taking place during this memorable evening at the king's card-table. The young queen, although Spanish by birth and the niece of Anne of Austria, loved the king and could not conceal her affection. Anne of Austria, a keen observer like all women, and imperious like every queen, was sensible of Madame's power, and bowed before it immediately,—a circumstance which induced the young queen to leave

the room and retire to her apartments. The king paid hardly any attention to her departure, notwithstanding the pretended symptoms of indisposition by which it was accompanied. Fortified by the rules of etiquette which he had begun to introduce at the court, as an element of every position and relation of life, Louis XIV. did not disturb himself; he offered his hand to Madame without looking at Monsieur his brother, and led the young princess to the door of her apartments. It was remarked that at the threshold of the door his Majesty, freed from every restraint, or not strong enough for the situation, let a deep sigh escape him. The ladies present—for nothing escapes a woman's observation, Mademoiselle de Montalais's for instance—did not fail to say to one another, "The king sighed;" and "Madame sighed too." This had been indeed the case. Madame had sighed very noiselessly, but with an accompaniment much more dangerous to the king's repose. Madame had sighed, closing her beautiful black eyes; then, opening them, laden as they were with an indescribable melancholy, she had raised them to the king, whose face at that moment had visibly heightened in colour. The consequence of these blushes, of these interchanged sighs, and of this royal agitation was that Montalais committed an indiscretion, which certainly affected her companion; for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, less clear-sighted perhaps, turned pale when the king blushed, and, her attendance being required upon Madame, she tremblingly followed the princess, without thinking to take the gloves, which court etiquette required her to do. True it is that this young country-girl might allege as an excuse the agitation into which the king threw her; for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, busily engaged in closing the door, had involuntarily fixed her eyes upon the king, who, as he retired backward, had his face towards it.

The king returned to the card-room. He tried to speak to the different persons there, but it could easily be seen that his mind was absent. He jumbled different scores together, which was taken advantage of by some of the noblemen who had retained that habit since the time of M. de Mazarin,—the habit of exercising bad memory and good calculation. In this way Manicamp, absent-minded as he was,—for M. Manicamp was the most honest man in the world, believe me, dear reader,—innocently appropriated twenty thousand livres, which were littering the table, and which did not seem legitimately to belong to any person in particular. In the same way M. de

Wardes, whose head was doubtless a little bewildered by the occurrences of the evening, left to the Duke of Buckingham sixty double louis which he had won, which the duke, incapable, like his father, of soiling his hands with coin of any sort, had left to the candelabra, which could not protect their property.

The king regained his presence of mind in some degree when M. Colbert, who had been narrowly observant for some minutes, approached, and with great respect indeed, but with much urgency, whispered a word of some sort in the still confused hearing of his Majesty. Louis, at the suggestion, listened with renewed attention, and immediately looking around him, said, "Is M. Fouquet no longer here?"—"Yes, Sire, I am here," replied the voice of the superintendent, who was engaged with Buckingham; and he approached the king, who advanced a step towards him with a smiling yet unceremonious air.

"Forgive me," said Louis, "if I interrupt your conversation; but I claim your attention whenever I may require your services."—"I am always at the king's service," replied Fouquet.

"And your cash-box too," said the king, laughing with a false smile.—"My cash-box more than anything else," said Fouquet, coldly.

"The fact is, Monsieur, I wish to give a *fête* at Fontainebleau, —to keep open house for a fortnight; and I shall require—" He stopped, glancing at Colbert. Fouquet waited without showing discomposure; and the king resumed, answering Colbert's cruel smile—"four million livres."—"Four million?" repeated Fouquet, bowing profoundly. The nails of the hand which was thrust in his bosom made bleeding furrows in his flesh, but the tranquil expression of his face remained unaltered. "When will they be required, Sire?"

"Take your time,—I mean—no, no; as soon as possible."—"A certain time will be necessary, Sire."—"Time!" exclaimed Colbert, triumphantly.

"The time, Monsieur," said the superintendent, with the haughtiest disdain, "simply to count the money; a million only can be drawn and weighed in a day."—"Four days, then," said Colbert.

"My clerks," replied Fouquet, addressing himself to the king, "will perform wonders for his Majesty's service, and the sum shall be ready in three days." It was for Colbert now to turn pale. Louis looked at him astonished. Fouquet withdrew without any parade or weakness, smiling at his numerous friends, in whose countenances alone he read the sincerity of their friend-

ship,—an interest partaking of compassion. Fouquet, however, should not be judged by his smile, for in reality he felt as if he had been stricken by death. Drops of blood beneath his coat stained the fine linen which covered his chest. His dress concealed the blood, and his smile the rage which devoured him. His domestics perceived, by the manner in which he approached his carriage, that their master was not in the best humour; the result of their discernment was that his orders were executed with that exactitude of manœuvre which is found on board a man-of-war commanded during a storm by a passionate captain. The carriage, therefore, did not simply roll along,—it flew.

Fouquet had hardly time to recover himself during the drive; on his arrival he went at once to Aramis, who had not yet retired for the night. As for Porthos, he had supped very agreeably from a roast leg of mutton, two pheasants, and a mountain of crawfish; he had then had his body anointed with perfumed oils, in the manner of the wrestlers of old, and when the anointment was completed, he was wrapped in flannels and placed in a warm bed. Aramis, as we have already said, had not retired. Seated at his ease in a velvet dressing-gown, he wrote letter after letter in his fine and hurried handwriting, a page of which contained a quarter of a volume.

The door was thrown hurriedly open, and the superintendent appeared, pale, agitated, and care-worn. Aramis looked up. "Good-evening," said he; and his searching look detected his host's sadness and disordered state of mind. "Was the play good at his Majesty's?" asked Aramis, by way of beginning the conversation. Fouquet threw himself upon a couch, and with a gesture showed the door to the servant who had followed him; then when the servant had left, he said, "Excellent."

Aramis, who had followed every movement with his eyes, noticed that he stretched himself upon the cushions with a sort of feverish impatience. "You have lost, as usual?" inquired Aramis, his pen still in his hand.—"More than usual," replied Fouquet.

"You know how to support losses."—"Sometimes."—"What! M. Fouquet a bad player!"—"There is play and play, M. d'Herblay."—"How much have you lost?" inquired Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

Fouquet collected himself a moment, to regain his usual command of his voice, and then, without the slightest emotion, said, "The evening has cost me four millions;" and a bitter

laugh drowned the last vibration of these words. Aramis, who did not expect such an amount, dropped his pen. "Four millions!" said he: "you have lost four millions,—impossible!" —"M. Colbert held my cards for me," replied the superintendent, with the same bitter laugh.

"Ah, now I understand; so, so, a new application for funds?" —"Yes, my friend, and from the king's own lips. It is impossible to destroy a man with a more charming smile. What do you think of it?"—"It is clear that your ruin is the object in view."—"So that is still your opinion?"—"Yes. Besides, there is nothing in it which should astonish you, for we have foreseen it all along."—"Yes; but I did not expect four millions."—"No doubt the amount is serious; but after all, four millions are not quite the death of a man, especially when the man in question is M. Fouquet."

"My dear D'Herblay, if you knew the contents of my coffers you would be less easy."—"And you promised?"—"What else could I do?"—"That's true."—"The very day when I refuse, Colbert will procure it; whence I know not, but he will procure the money, and I shall be lost."—"There is no doubt of that. In how many days hence have you promised these four millions?"—"In three days; the king seemed exceedingly pressed."

"In three days?"—"Oh, my friend," resumed Fouquet, "when I think that just now, as I passed along the streets, the people cried out, 'There is the rich M. Fouquet,' it is enough to turn my brain."—"Stay, Monsieur! the matter is not worth so much trouble," said Aramis, calmly, sprinkling some sand over the letter he had just written.

"Suggest a remedy, then, for this evil without a remedy."—"There is only one remedy for you,—pay."—"But it is very uncertain whether I have the money. Everything must be exhausted: Belle-Isle is paid for; the pension has been paid; and money, since the investigation of the accounts of those who farm the revenue, is scarce. Besides, admitting that I pay this time, how can I do so on another occasion? For be very sure that we are not through with it all. When kings have tasted money, they are like tigers who have tasted flesh,—they devour everything. The day will come when I shall have to say, 'Impossible, Sire,' and on that very day I am a lost man." Aramis raised his shoulders slightly, saying, "A man in your position, my Lord, is only lost when he wishes to be so."

"A man, whatever his position may be, cannot hope to

struggle against a king."—"Nonsense; when I was young I struggled successfully with the Cardinal Richelieu, who was King of France,—nay more, cardinal."—"Where are my armies, my troops, my treasures? I have not even Belle-Isle."—"Bah! necessity is the mother of invention; and when you think all is lost, something unexpected will be discovered which shall save everything."

"Who will discover this marvellous something?"—"Yourself."—"I! I resign my office of inventor."—"Then I will."—"Be it so.. But then, set to work without delay."—"Oh, we have time enough!"—"You are killing me, D'Herblay, with your calmness," said the superintendent, passing his handkerchief over his brow.

"Do you not remember that I once told you never to make yourself uneasy, if you possess but courage? Have you any?"—"I believe so."—"Then don't make yourself uneasy."

"It is decided, then, that at the last moment you will come to my assistance."—"It will only be the repayment of a debt I owe you, Monseigneur."—"It is the vocation of financiers to anticipate the wants of men such as yourself, D'Herblay."—"If obligingness is the vocation of financiers, charity is a virtue of the clergy. Only, on this occasion do you act, Monsieur. You are not yet sufficiently reduced, and at the last moment we shall see what is to be done."

"We shall see, then, in a very short time."—"Very well. Now, permit me to tell you that, personally, I regret exceedingly that you are at present so short of money, because I was myself about to ask you for some."—"For yourself?"—"For myself or some of my people,—for mine or for ours."—"How much do you want?"—"Be easy on that score,—a roundish sum, it is true, but not too exorbitant."

"Tell me the amount."—"Fifty thousand livres."—"Oh, a mere nothing! Of course one has always fifty thousand livres. Why the deuce cannot that knave Colbert be as easily satisfied as you are? I should give myself far less trouble than I do. When do you need this sum?"—"To-morrow morning; but you require to know its destination?"—"Nay, nay, Chevalier, I need no explanation."

"You must have one: to-morrow is the 1st of June."—"Well?"—"One of our bonds becomes due."—"I did not know we had any bonds."—"Certainly; to-morrow we pay our last third."—"What third?"—"Of the one hundred and fifty thousand livres to Baisemeaux."

"Baisemeaux,—who is he?"—"The governor of the Bastille."—"Ah! yes, I remember; but on what grounds am I to pay one hundred and fifty thousand livres to that man?"—"On account of the appointment which he, or rather we, purchased from Louvière and Tremblay."—"My recollection of the whole matter is very vague."—"That is likely enough, for you have so many affairs to attend to; however, I do not believe you have any affair of greater importance than this one."—"Tell me, then, why we purchased this appointment."—"Why, in order to render him a service, in the first place, and afterwards ourselves."—"Ourselves? You are joking."—"Monseigneur, the time may come when the governor of the Bastille may prove a very excellent acquaintance."—"I have not the good fortune to understand you, D'Herblay."

"Monseigneur, we have our own poets, our own engineer, our own architect, our own musicians, our own printer, and our own painters; we might need our own governor of the Bastille."—"Do you think so?"—"Let us not deceive ourselves, Monseigneur; we are very liable to pay the Bastille a visit, my dear M. Fouquet," added the prelate, displaying beneath his pale lips teeth which were still the same beautiful teeth so admired thirty years before by Marie Michon.

"And you think it is not too much to pay one hundred and fifty thousand livres for that, D'Herblay? I assure you that you generally invest your money better."—"The day will come when you will admit your mistake."—"My dear D'Herblay, the very day on which a man enters the Bastille, he is no longer protected by the past."—"Yes, he is, if the bonds are perfectly regular; besides, that good fellow Baisemeaux has not a courtier's heart. I am certain, my Lord, that he will not remain ungrateful for that money, without taking into account, I repeat, that I retain the acknowledgments."

"What a bedevilled affair,—usury in a matter of benevolence!"—"Do not mix yourself up with it, Monseigneur; if there be usury, it is I who practise it, and both of us profit by it,—that is all."—"Some intrigue, D'Herblay?"—"I do not deny it."—"And Baisemeaux an accomplice in it?"—"Why not? there are worse accomplices than he. May I depend, then, upon the five thousand pistoles to-morrow?"

"Do you want them this evening?"—"It would be better, for I wish to start early; poor Baisemeaux will not be able to imagine what has become of me, and must be upon thorns."—"You shall have the amount in an hour. Ah, D'Herblay, the

interest of your one hundred and fifty thousand livres will never pay my four millions for me!" said Fouquet, rising.

"Why not, Monseigneur?"—"Good-night; I have business with my clerks before I retire."—"A good night's rest, Monseigneur."—"D'Herblay, you wish me what is impossible."—"Shall I have my fifty thousand livres this evening?"—"Yes."—"Go to sleep, then, in perfect safety; it is I who tell you to do so. Good-night, Monseigneur!"

Notwithstanding this assurance, and the tone in which it was given, Fouquet left the room shaking his head and heaving a sigh.

CHAPTER XCVII

M. BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN'S LITTLE ACCOUNTS

THE clock of St. Paul's was striking seven as Aramis, on horseback, dressed as a simple citizen,—that is to say, in a coloured suit, with no distinctive mark about him except a kind of hunting-knife by his side,—passed before the Rue du Petit-Musc, and stopped opposite the Rue des Tournelles, at the gate of the Bastille. Two sentries were on duty at the gate; they raised no difficulty about admitting Aramis, who entered without dismounting, and they pointed out the way he was to go by a long passage with buildings on both sides. This passage led to the drawbridge, or, in other words, to the real entrance. The drawbridge was down, and the duty of the day was about to begin. The sentinel at the outer guard-house stopped Aramis's further progress, asking him, in a rough tone of voice, what had brought him there. Aramis explained with his usual politeness that a wish to speak to M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun had occasioned his visit. The first sentinel then summoned a second sentinel, stationed within an inner lodge, who showed his face at the grating, and inspected the new arrival very attentively. Aramis reiterated the expression of his wish to see the governor, whereupon the sentinel called to an officer of lower grade, who was walking about in a tolerably spacious courtyard, and who in his turn, on being informed of his object, ran to seek one of the officers of the governor's staff. The latter, after having listened to Aramis's request, begged him to wait a moment, then went away a short distance, but returned to ask his name. "I cannot tell it to you, Monsieur," said Aramis; "but be assured that I have matters of such importance to

communicate to the governor that I can only guarantee that M. de Baisemeaux will be delighted to see me; nay, more than that, when you shall have told him that it is the person whom he expected on the 1st of June, I am convinced that he will hasten here himself."

The officer could not be made to believe that a man of the governor's station should put himself out for a man of so little importance as the bourgeois-looking person on horseback appeared to be. "It happens most fortunately, Monsieur," he said, "that Monsieur the Governor is just getting ready to go out, and you can perceive his carriage with the horses already harnessed in the government courtyard; there will be no occasion for him to come to meet you, as he will see you as he passes by."

Aramis bowed to signify his assent; he did not wish to inspire others with too exalted an opinion of himself, and therefore waited patiently and in silence, leaning upon the saddle-bow of his horse. Ten minutes had hardly elapsed when the governor's carriage was observed to move. The governor appeared at the door, and got into the carriage, which immediately prepared to start. The same ceremony was observed for the governor himself as for a suspected stranger: the sentinel at the lodge advanced as the carriage was about to pass under the arch, and the governor opened the carriage-door, himself setting the example of obedience to orders; so that in this way the sentinel could convince himself that no one was smuggled out of the Bastille.

The carriage rolled along under the archway; but at the moment when the iron gate was opened, the officer approached the carriage, which had stopped for the second time, and spoke a few words to the governor, who immediately put his head out of the window, and perceived Aramis on horseback at the end of the drawbridge. He straightway uttered almost a shout of delight, and got out, or rather darted out, of his carriage, running towards Aramis, whose hands he seized, making a thousand apologies. He came very near kissing him. "What a difficult matter to enter the Bastille, Monsieur the Governor!" said Aramis. "Is it the same for those who are sent here against their wills as for those who come of their own accord?" —"A thousand pardons, Monseigneur! How delighted I am to see your Grace!"—"Hush! What are you thinking of, my dear M. de Baisemeaux? What do you suppose would be thought of a bishop in my present costume?"—"Pray excuse

me, I had forgotten. Take this gentleman's horse to the stables," cried Baisemeaux.—"No, no," said Aramis; "I have five thousand pistoles in the portmanteau."

The governor's countenance became so radiant that if the prisoners had seen him they would have imagined some prince of the blood had arrived. "Yes, you are right; the horse shall be taken to the government house. Will you get into the carriage, my dear M. d'Herblay, and it shall take us back to my house."—"Get into a carriage to cross a courtyard, Monsieur the Governor! Do you believe that I am so great an invalid? No, no; we will go on foot."

Baisemeaux then offered his arm as a support, but the prelate did not accept it. They arrived in this manner at the government house, Baisemeaux rubbing his hands and glancing at the horse from time to time, while Aramis was looking at the bare and black walls. A tolerably handsome vestibule, a straight staircase of white stone, led to the governor's apartments. Baisemeaux crossed the antechamber, the dining-room, where breakfast was being prepared, opened a small private door, and closeted himself with his guest in a large cabinet, the windows of which opened obliquely upon the courtyard and the stables. He installed the prelate with that obsequious politeness of which a good man or a grateful man alone possesses the secret. An arm-chair, a footstool, a small table beside him on which to rest his hand,—everything was prepared by the governor himself. With his own hands, too, he placed upon the table, with an almost religious solicitude, the bag containing the gold, which one of the soldiers had brought up with as much reverence as that with which a priest bears the holy sacrament. The soldier having left the room, Baisemeaux himself closed the door after him, drew aside one of the window-curtains, and looked searchingly at Aramis to see if the prelate required anything further. "Well, Monseigneur," said he, still standing up, "of all men of their word, you still continue to be the most punctual."

"In matters of business, dear M. de Baisemeaux, exactitude is not a virtue only, but a duty as well."—"Yes, in matters of business, certainly; but your affair with me is not of that character, my Lord,—it is a service you are rendering me."—"Come, come, dear M. de Baisemeaux, confess that, notwithstanding this exactitude, you have not been without a little uneasiness."—"About your health, yes, certainly," stammered Baisemeaux.

"I wished to come here yesterday, but I was not able, as I

was too fatigued," continued Aramis. Baisemeaux anxiously slipped another cushion behind his guest's back. "But," continued Aramis, "I promised myself to come and pay you a visit to-day, early in the morning."—"You are really very kind, Monseigneur."

"And it was a good thing for me that I was punctual, I think."—"What do you mean?"—"Why, you were going out." At this latter remark Baisemeaux coloured and said, "Yes, it is true I was going out."

"Then I incommode you," said Aramis; whereupon the embarrassment of Baisemeaux became visibly greater. "I am putting you to inconvenience," he continued, fixing a keen glance upon the poor governor; "if I had known that, I should not have come."—"Ah! Monseigneur, how can you imagine that you could ever inconvenience me?"—"Confess that you were going in quest of money."—"No," stammered Baisemeaux, "no; I assure you I was going to—"

"Does the governor still intend to go to M. Fouquet's?" suddenly called out the major from below. Baisemeaux ran to the window like a madman. "No, no!" he exclaimed in a state of desperation; "who the deuce is speaking of M. Fouquet? Are you drunk below there? Why am I interrupted when I am busy?"

"You were going to M. Fouquet's," said Aramis, biting his lips,—"to the abbé's or the superintendent's?" Baisemeaux almost made up his mind to tell an untruth, but he could not summon courage to do so. "To Monsieur the Superintendent's," he said.—"It is true, then, that you were in want of money, since you were going to the person who gives it away?"—"I assure you, Monseigneur—"—"You distrusted me."—"My dear Lord, it was the uncertainty and ignorance in which I was as to where you were to be found."

"You would have found the money you require at M. Fouquet's, dear M. Baisemeaux, for he is a man whose hand is always open."—"I swear that I should never have ventured to ask M. Fouquet for money. I only wished to ask him for your address, that is all."—"To ask M. Fouquet for my address?" exclaimed Aramis, opening his eyes in real astonishment.—"Yes," said Baisemeaux, greatly disturbed by the glance which the prelate fixed upon him, "at M. Fouquet's, certainly."—"There is no harm in that, dear M. Baisemeaux; only I would ask, Why ask my address of M. Fouquet?"—"That I might write to you."—"I understand," said Aramis, smiling;

"but that is not what I meant. I do not ask you what you required my address for; I only ask why you should go to M. Fouquet for it?"—"Oh!" said Baisemeaux, "as Belle-Isle is the property of M. Fouquet, and as Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes, and as you are bishop of Vannes—"—"But, my dear Baisemeaux, since you knew that I was bishop of Vannes, you had no occasion to ask M. Fouquet for my address."

"Well, Monsieur," said Baisemeaux, at his wits' end, "if I have acted indiscreetly, I beg your pardon most sincerely."—"Nonsense!" observed Aramis, calmly; "how can you possibly have acted indiscreetly?" And while he composed his face, and smiled cheerfully on the governor, he was considering how Baisemeaux, who was not aware of his address, yet knew that Vannes was his residence. "I will clear all this up," he said to himself; and then speaking aloud, added, "Well, my dear governor, shall we now arrange our little accounts?"

"I am at your orders, my Lord; but tell me beforehand, my Lord, whether you will do me the honour to breakfast with me as usual?"—"Very willingly indeed."—"That is right," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell before him three times.—"What does that mean?" inquired Aramis.—"That I have some one to breakfast with me, and that preparations are to be made accordingly."—"And you rang thrice. Really, my dear Governor, I begin to think that you are acting ceremoniously with me."

"Oh, no, indeed! Besides, the least I can do is to receive you in the best way I can."—"But why so?"—"Because not a prince, even, would have done what you have for me."—"Nonsense, nonsense!"—"Nay, I assure you—"—"Let us speak of other matters," said Aramis; "or rather, tell me how your affairs here are getting on. Are the prisoners generous?"—"Not over-much."—"The deuce!"

"M. de Mazarin was not hard enough."—"Yes, I see; you need a suspicious government,—like that of the old cardinal, for instance."—"Yes; business was better under him. The brother of his 'grey eminence' made his fortune in it."—"Believe me, my dear Governor," said Aramis, drawing closer to Baisemeaux, "a young king is well worth an old cardinal. Youth has its suspicions, its fits of anger, its prejudices, as old age has its hatreds, its precautions, and its fears. Have you paid your three years' profits to Louvière and to Tremblay?"—"Good heavens! yes."

"So that you have nothing more to give them than the fifty

thousand livres which I have brought you? "—"Yes."—"You have not saved anything, then?"—"Ah, Monseigneur, in giving the fifty thousand livres of my own to these gentlemen, I assure you that I give them everything I earn. I told M. d'Artagnan so yesterday evening."

"Ah!" said Aramis, whose eyes sparkled for a moment, but immediately became quiet again; "so you have seen my old friend D'Artagnan. How was he?"—"Wonderfully well."—"And what did you say to him, M. de Baisemeaux?"—"I told him," continued the governor, not perceiving his own thoughtlessness,—"I told him that I fed my prisoners too well."

"How many have you?" inquired Aramis, in an indifferent tone of voice.—"Sixty."—"Well, that is a tolerably round number."—"Ah, Monseigneur, formerly there were, during certain years, as many as two hundred."—"Still a minimum of sixty is not to be grumbled at."—"Perhaps not; for to anybody but myself each prisoner would bring in one hundred and fifty pistoles,—for instance, for a prince of the blood I have fifty livres a day."—"Only, you have no prince of the blood; at least, I suppose so," said Aramis, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"No, thank Heaven!—I mean, no, unfortunately."—"Why do you say 'unfortunately'?"—"Because my position would be improved by it. So, fifty livres per day for a prince of the blood, thirty-six for a marshal of France—"—"But you have no more marshals of France just now, I suppose, than princes of the blood?"—"Alas! no; it is true that lieutenant-generals and brigadiers pay twenty-four livres, and I have two of them. After that come the councillors of the parliament, who bring me fifteen livres, and I have six of them."

"I did not know," said Aramis, "that councillors were worth so much."—"Yes; but from fifteen livres I sink at once to ten, —namely, for an ordinary judge or for an ecclesiastic."—"And you have seven, you say; a fine catch!"—"Nay, a bad one, and for this reason. How can I possibly treat these poor fellows, who are of some importance at all events, otherwise than I treat a councillor of the parliament?"—"Yes, you are right; I do not see five livres' difference between them."

"You understand, if I have a fine fish, I always pay four or five livres for it; if I get a fine fowl, it costs me a livre and a half. I fatten a good deal of poultry, but I have to buy grain, and you cannot imagine the multitude of rats which infest this place."—"Why not get half-a-dozen cats to deal with them?"

—"Cats, indeed; yes, they eat them, but I was obliged to give up the idea because of the way in which they treated my grain. I have been obliged to have some terrier dogs sent me from England to kill the rats. The dogs have tremendous appetites; they eat as much as a prisoner of the fifth order, without taking into account the rabbits and fowls they kill." Was Aramis really listening or not? No one could have told; his downcast eyes showed the attentive man, but the restless hand betrayed the man absorbed in thought,—Aramis was meditating. "I was saying," continued Baisemeaux, "that a passable fowl costs me a livre and a half, and that a good-sized fish costs me four or five livres. Three meals are served at the Bastille; and as the prisoners, having nothing to do, are always eating, a ten-livre man costs me seven livres and a half."

"But did you not say that you treated those at ten livres like those at fifteen?"—"Yes, certainly."—"Very well! Then you gain seven livres and a half upon those who pay you fifteen livres."—"I must compensate myself somehow," said Baisemeaux, who saw that he had been caught.

"You are quite right, my dear governor; but have you no prisoners below ten livres?"—"Oh, yes; we have citizens and barristers taxed at five livres."—"And do they eat too?"—"Not a doubt about it; only, you understand they do not get a sole or a fat chicken or Spanish wines every day, but at all events thrice a week they have a good dish for their dinner."

"Really, you are quite a philanthropist, my dear governor, and you will ruin yourself."—"No; understand me. When the fifteen-livre has not eaten his fowl, or the ten-livre has left his dish unfinished, I send it to the five-livre prisoner; it is a feast for the poor devil, and one must be charitable, you know."—"And what do you make out of your five-livre prisoners?"—"A livre and a half."—"Baisemeaux, you're an honest fellow; in honest truth, I say so."—"Thank you, my Lord, I think you are quite right, now. But I feel most for the small tradesmen and bailiffs' clerks, who are rated at three livres. Those do not often see Rhine carp or Channel sturgeon."

"But do not the five-livre gentlemen sometimes leave some scraps?"—"Oh, my Lord, do not believe I am so stingy as that! I delight the heart of some poor little tradesman or clerk by sending him a wing of red partridge, a slice of venison, or a bit of truffled pasty,—dishes which he never tasted except in his dreams, and which are the leavings of the twenty-four-livre prisoners,—and he eats and drinks; at dessert he cries, 'Long

live the king!' and blesses the Bastille; with a couple of bottles of champagne, which cost me five sous, I make him tipsy every Sunday. That class of people call down blessings upon me, and are sorry to leave the prison. Do you know that I have remarked—and it does me infinite honour—that certain prisoners who have been set at liberty have almost immediately afterwards got imprisoned again? Why should this be the case, if not to taste my fare? It is really the fact." Aramis smiled with an expression of incredulity. "You smile," said Baisemeaux.—"I do," returned Aramis.

"I tell you that we have names which have been inscribed on our books thrice in the space of two years."—"I must see it to believe it," said Aramis.—"Well, I can show it to you, although it is forbidden to exhibit the registers to strangers; and if you really wish to see it with your own eyes—"—"I should be delighted, I confess."

"Very well," said Baisemeaux; and he took out of a closet a large register. Aramis eagerly followed him with his eyes, and Baisemeaux returned, placed the register upon the table, turned over the leaves for a minute, and stopped at the letter M. "Look here, for instance," said he: "'Martinier, January, 1659; Martinier, June, 1660; Martinier, March, 1661, pamphlets, Mazarinades, etc.' You understand it was only a pretext; people were not sent to the Bastille for jokes against M. Mazarin; the fellow denounced himself in order to get imprisoned here. And what was his object, Monsieur? None other than to return to eat my fare at three livres the head!"—"Three livres—poor devil!"—"The poet, my Lord, belongs to the lowest scale, to the same style of board to which the small tradesman and bailiff's clerk belong; but, I repeat, it is to these people only that I give those little surprises."

Aramis mechanically turned over the leaves of the register, continuing to read without appearing to take any interest in the names he read. "In 1661 you perceive," said Baisemeaux, "eighty entries; and in 1659, eighty also."

"Ah!" said Aramis. "Seldon; I seem to know that name. Was it not you who spoke to me about a certain young man?"—"Yes, a poor devil of a student who made— What do you call that where two Latin verses rhyme together?"—"A distich."—"Yes; that is it."—"Poor fellow! for a distich."—"*Peste!* How you go on! Do you not know that he made this distich against the Jesuits?"—"That makes no difference; the punishment seems very severe."

"Do not pity him; last year you seemed to interest yourself in him."—"Yes, I did so."—"Well, as your interest is all-powerful here, my Lord, since that time I have treated him as a prisoner at fifteen livres."—"The same as this one, then," said Aramis, who had continued to turn over the leaves, and who had stopped at one of the names which followed that of Martinier.—"Yes, the same as that one."

"Is that Marchiali an Italian?" asked Aramis, pointing with his finger to the name which had attracted his attention.—"Hush!" said Baisemeaux.—"Why hush?" said Aramis, involuntarily clinching his white hand.—"I thought I had already spoken to you about that Marchiali."—"No; this is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced."—"That may be, but I may have spoken to you about him without naming him."

"Is he an old offender?" asked Aramis, attempting to smile.—"On the contrary, he is quite young."—"Is his crime, then, very heinous?"—"Unpardonable."—"Has he assassinated any one?"—"Bah!"—"An incendiary, then?"—"Bah!"—"Has he slandered any one?"—"No, no! It is he who—" and Baisemeaux approached Aramis's ear, making a sort of ear-trumpet of his hands, and whispered,—"it is he who presumes to resemble the—"

"Yes, yes," said Aramis, "I now remember that you spoke to me about it last year; but the crime appeared to me so slight."—"Slight!"—"Or rather, so involuntary."—"My Lord, it is not involuntarily that such a resemblance is detected."—"Well, the fact is, I had forgotten it. But, my dear host," said Aramis, closing the register, "if I am not mistaken, we are summoned."

Baisemeaux took the register, hastily restored it to its place in the closet, which he closed, and put the key in his pocket. "Will it be agreeable to your Lordship to breakfast now?" said he; "for you are right in supposing that breakfast was announced."—"Assuredly, my dear Governor;" and they passed into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XCVIII

M. DE BAISEMEAUX'S BREAKFAST

ARAMIS was generally temperate; but on this occasion, while observing due caution in regard to the wine, he did ample justice to Baisemeaux's breakfast, which in every respect was most excellent. The latter, for his part, was animated with the wildest gaiety; the sight of the five thousand pistoles, which he glanced at from time to time, expanded his heart. Every now and then, too, he looked at Aramis with an expression of the deepest gratitude; while the latter, leaning back in his chair, sipped a few drops of wine from his glass, with the air of a connoisseur. "Let me never hear an ill word against the fare of the Bastille," said he, half closing his eyes; "happy are the prisoners who can get only half a bottle of this Burgundy every day!"—"All those at fifteen livres drink it," said Baisemeaux. "It is very old Volnay."

"Does that poor student Seldon drink this excellent Volnay?"—"Oh, no!"—"I thought I heard you say that he was boarded at fifteen livres."—"He! No, indeed! A man who makes districts—distichs I mean—at fifteen livres! Nonsense! it is his neighbour who is at fifteen livres."

"Which neighbour?"—"The other; the second Bertaudière."—"Excuse me, my dear Governor; but you speak a language which requires an apprenticeship to understand."—"Very true," said the governor. "Allow me to explain: the second Bertaudière is the person who occupies the second floor of the tower of the Bertaudière."

"So that Bertaudière is the name of one of the towers of the Bastille? The fact is, I think I recollect hearing that each tower has a name of its own. Whereabouts is the one you are speaking of?"—"Look!" said Baisemeaux, going to the window. "It is that tower to the left,—the second one."—"Is the prisoner at fifteen livres there?"—"Yes."—"Since when?"—"Seven or eight years, nearly."—"What do you mean by nearly? Do you not know the dates more precisely?"—"It was not in my time, dear M. d'Herblay."

"But I should have thought that Louvière or Tremblay would have told you."—"The secrets of the Bastille are never handed over with the keys of its governorship."—"Indeed!

Then the cause of his imprisonment is a mystery, a State secret." —"Oh, no! I do not suppose it is a State secret, but a secret like everything else that happens at the Bastille."

"But," said Aramis, "why do you speak more freely of Seldon than of—" — "Of the second Bertaudière?" — "Yes."— "Because, in my opinion, the crime of the man who writes a distich is not so great as that of the man who resembles—"— "Yes, yes; I understand you. Still, do not the turnkeys talk with your prisoners?"—"Of course."—"The prisoners, I suppose, tell them they are not guilty?"—"They are always telling them that; it is a matter of course,—the same song over and over again."—"But does not the resemblance you were just now speaking about strike the turnkeys?"—"My dear M. d'Herblay, it is only for men attached to the court as you are, to take any trouble about such matters."

"You're right, you're right, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. Just a drop more of that Volnay, if you please."—"Not a drop merely; a glass."—"Nay, nay! You are a musketeer still, to the very tips of your fingers, while I have become a bishop. A drop for me; a glass for yourself."—"As you please;" and Aramis and the governor touched glasses.

"But," said Aramis, looking with fixed attention at the ruby liquid he had raised to the level of his eyes, as if he wished to enjoy it with all his senses alike,—"that what you might call a resemblance, another would not perhaps take any notice of." —"Most certainly he would, though, if it were any one who knew the person he resembles."—"I really think, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that it can be nothing more than a resemblance of your own imagination."—"Upon my honour, it is not so."

"Stay!" continued Aramis. "I have seen many persons very like the one we are speaking of; but, out of respect, no one ever said anything about it."—"Very likely; because there is resemblance and resemblance. This is a striking one; and if you were to see him, you would admit it to be so yourself."— "If I were to see him, indeed," said Aramis, in an indifferent tone; "but in all probability I never shall."

"Why not?"—"Because if I were even to put my foot inside one of those horrible dungeons, I should fancy that I was buried there for ever."—"Oh, no; they are fine places to live in."—"I really do not and cannot believe it, and that is a fact."—"Pray do not speak ill of the second Bertaudière! It is really a good room, very nicely furnished and carpeted. The young fellow has by no means been unhappy there; the best

lodging the Bastille affords has been his. There is a chance for you."

"Nay, nay," said Aramis, coldly; "you will never make me believe that there are any good rooms in the Bastille; and as for your carpets, they exist only in your imagination. I should find nothing but spiders, rats, and perhaps toads too."—"Toads? Ah! I don't say there are not toads in the dungeons."—"But I should see no furniture and not a sign of a carpet."—"Will you be convinced by your own eyes?" said Baisemeaux, with sudden impulse.

"No, certainly not."—"Not even to satisfy yourself of the resemblance which you deny, as you deny the existence of the carpets?"—"Some spectral-looking person, a mere shadow,—an unhappy, dying man."—"Nothing of the kind,—as brisk and vigorous a young fellow as ever lived."—"Melancholy and ill-tempered, then?"—"Not at all; very gay and lively."—"Nonsense! you are joking."—"Will you follow me?" said Baisemeaux.

"What for?"—"To go the round of the Bastille."—"Why?"—"You will then see for yourself,—see with your own eyes."—"But the regulations?"—"Never mind them! To-day my major has leave of absence; the lieutenant is visiting the posts on the bastions; we are masters of the position."—"No, no, my dear Governor! Why, the very idea of the sound of the bolts which we must draw makes me shudder. You will only have to forget me in the second or fourth Bertaudière. Ugh!—"

"You are refusing a rare opportunity. Do you know that to obtain the favour I propose to you gratis, some of the princes of the blood have offered me as much as fifty thousand livres."—"Really! he must be worth seeing, then?"—"Forbidden fruit, my Lord,—forbidden fruit! You who belong to the Church ought to know that."—"Well, if I had any curiosity, it would be to see the poor author of the distich."—"Very well, we will see him too, he is near by; but if I were at all curious, it would be about the beautiful carpeted room and its lodger."—"Furniture is very commonplace; and a face with no expression in it offers little or no interest."

"But a boarder at fifteen livres is always interesting."—"By the by, I forgot to ask you about that. Why fifteen livres for him, and only three livres for poor Seldon?"—"The distinction made in that instance was a truly noble act, and one which displayed the king's goodness of heart to great advantage."—"The king's, you say?"

"The cardinal's, I mean; 'This unhappy man,' said M. de Mazarin, 'is destined to remain in prison for ever.'"—"Why so?"—"Why, it seems that his crime is a lasting one; and consequently his punishment ought to be so too."—"Lasting?"—"No doubt of it, unless he is fortunate enough to catch the small-pox, you see; and even that chance is unlikely, for we never have any impure air in the Bastille."

"Nothing can be more ingenious than your train of reasoning, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. Do you mean to say, however, that this unfortunate man must suffer without respite and for ever?"—"I did not say suffer, my Lord; a fifteen-livre boarder does not suffer."—"He suffers imprisonment, at all events."—"No doubt; there is no help for that. But this suffering is sweetened for him. You must admit that this young fellow was not born to eat all the good things he does eat: for instance, such things as we have on the table now,—this pasty that has not been touched, these crawfish from the river Marne, of which we have hardly taken any, and which are almost as large as lobsters,—all these things will at once be taken to the second Bertaudière, with a bottle of that Volnay which you think so good. After you have seen it, you will believe it, I hope."

"Yes, my dear Governor, certainly; but all this time you are thinking only of your blissful fifteen-livre prisoner, and you forget poor Seldon, my *protégé*."—"Well, out of consideration for you, it shall be a gala-day for him; he shall have some biscuits and preserves, with this small bottle of port."—"You are a good-hearted fellow; I have said so already, and I repeat it, my dear Baisemeaux."—"Well, let us set off, then," said the governor, a little giddy, partly from the wine he had drunk and partly from Aramis's praises.

"Do not forget that I go only to oblige you," said the prelate.—"Very well; but you will thank me when you get there."—"Let us go, then."

"Wait until I have summoned the jailer," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell twice; at which summons a man appeared. "I am going to visit the towers," said the governor; "no guards, no drums, no noise at all!"—"If I were not to leave my cloak here," said Aramis, pretending to be alarmed, "I should really think that I was going to prison on my own account." The jailer preceded the governor, Aramis walking on his right hand; some of the soldiers who happened to be in the court-yard drew themselves up in line, as stiff as posts, as the governor

passed along. Baisemeaux led the way down several steps which brought them to a sort of esplanade; thence they arrived at the drawbridge, where the sentinels on duty received the governor with the proper honours. The governor turned towards Aramis, and speaking in such a tone that the sentinels could not lose a word, he said, "I hope you have a good memory, Monsieur?"—"Why?" inquired Aramis.

"On account of your plans and measurements; for you know that no one, not even an architect, is allowed to enter where the prisoners are, if he has paper, pens, or pencil."—"Good," said Aramis to himself, "it seems that I am an architect, then? It sounds like one of D'Artagnan's jokes, who saw me acting as an engineer at Belle-Isle." Then he said aloud, "Be easy on that score, Monsieur; in our profession a mere glance and a good memory are quite sufficient."

Baisemeaux did not change countenance, and the soldiers took Aramis for what he seemed to be. "Very well; we will first visit La Bertaudière," said Baisemeaux, still intending the sentinels to hear him. Then, turning to the jailer, he added, "You will take the opportunity of carrying to No. 2 the few dainties I pointed out."

"Dear M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, "you are always forgetting No. 3."—"So I am," said the governor; and upon that, they began to ascend. The number of bolts, gratings, and locks for this single courtyard would have sufficed for the safety of an entire city. Aramis was neither an imaginative nor a sensitive man; he had been somewhat of a poet in his youth, but his heart was hard and indifferent, as is the heart of every man of fifty-five years of age, who has been frequently and passionately attached to women in his lifetime, or rather who has been passionately loved by them. But when he placed his foot upon the worn stone steps along which so many unhappy wretches had passed, when he felt himself impregnated as it were with the atmosphere of those gloomy arches moistened with tears, there could be but little doubt that he was overcome by his feelings, for his head was bowed and his eyes became dim, and he followed Baisemeaux without uttering a syllable.

CHAPTER XCIX

THE SECOND FLOOR OF LA BERTAUDIÈRE

On the second flight of stairs, whether from fatigue or emotion, the breath of the visitor began to fail him, and he leaned against the wall. "Will you begin with this one?" said Baisemeaux; "for since we are going to both, it matters very little whether we ascend from the second to the third story, or descend from the third to the second. There are, besides, certain repairs to be made in this chamber," he hastened to add for the benefit of the turnkey, who he saw was within the sound of his voice.—"No, no," exclaimed Aramis, eagerly; "higher, if you please, Monsieur the Governor. The one above is the more urgent." They continued their ascent.

"Ask the jailer for the keys," whispered Aramis. Baisemeaux did so, took the keys, and himself opened the door of room No. 3. The jailer was the first to enter; he placed upon the table the provisions which the kind-hearted governor called dainties, and then left the room. The prisoner had not stirred. Baisemeaux then entered, while Aramis remained at the threshold, from which place he saw a youth of about eighteen years of age, who raising his head at the unusual noise jumped off the bed, as he perceived the governor, and clasping his hands began to cry out, "My mother, my mother!" in tones which betrayed such deep distress that Aramis, despite his command over himself, felt a shudder pass through his frame.

"My dear boy," said Baisemeaux, endeavouring to smile, "I have brought you a diversion and an extra,—the one for the mind, the other for the body; this gentleman has come to take some measures about here, and here are some preserves for your dessert."—"Oh, Monsieur," exclaimed the young man, "keep me in solitude for a year, let me have nothing but bread and water for a year, but tell me that at the end of that time I shall leave this place, tell me that at the end of a year I shall then see my mother again!"

"But, my dear friend," said Baisemeaux, "I have heard you say that your mother was very poor, and that you were very badly lodged when you were living with her; while here—upon my word!"—"If she were poor, Monsieur, the greater reason to restore her only means of support to her! Badly lodged with

her! oh, Monsieur, every one is always well lodged when he is free."

"At all events, since you yourself admit that you have done nothing but write that unhappy distich—"—"But without meaning anything, I swear; I was reading Martial when the idea came to me. Let me be punished,—cut off the hand with which I wrote it, I will work with the other,—but restore my mother to me!"—"My boy," said Baisemeaux, "you know very well that it does not depend upon me; all I can do for you is to increase your rations, give you a glass of port wine now and then, or slip in a biscuit for you between a couple of plates."—"My God!" exclaimed the young man, falling backward and rolling on the floor.

Aramis, unable to bear this scene any longer, withdrew as far as the landing. "Poor wretch!" he murmured.—"Yes, Monsieur, he is indeed very wretched," said the jailer; "but it is his parents' fault."—"In what way?"—"Because they let him learn Latin. Too much knowledge, you see; there is the harm. Now I, for instance, can't read or write, and therefore I am not in prison." Aramis looked at the man who did not call being a jailer in the Bastille being in prison. As for Baisemeaux, noticing the little effect produced by his advice and his port wine, he left the dungeon quite upset.

"You have forgotten to close the door," said the jailer.—"So I have," said Baisemeaux; "there are the keys, do you do it."

"I will solicit the pardon of that poor boy," said Aramis.—"And if you do not succeed," said Baisemeaux, "at least beg that he may be transferred to the ten-livre list, by which both he and I shall be gainers."

"If the other prisoner calls out for his mother in a similar manner," said Aramis, "I prefer not to enter at all, but will take my measurements from outside."—"No fear of that, Monsieur architect," said the jailer. "This one here is as gentle as a lamb; before he could call after his mother he must open his lips, and he never says a word."—"Let us go in, then," said Aramis, gloomily.

"Are you the architect of the prisons, Monsieur?" said the jailer.—"I am."—"It is odd, then, that you are not more accustomed to all this."

Aramis perceived that, to avoid giving rise to any suspicions, he must summon all his strength of mind to his assistance. Baisemeaux, who carried the keys, opened the door. "Stay

outside," said he to the jailer, "and wait for us at the bottom of the steps." The jailer obeyed, and withdrew.

Baisemeaux entered first, and opened the second door himself. By the light which filtered through the iron-barred window could be seen a handsome young man, short in stature, with closely cut hair, and a beard just beginning to grow; he was sitting on a stool, his elbow resting on an arm-chair, and all the upper part of his body reclining against it. His coat, thrown upon the bed, was of rich black velvet; and he inhaled the fresh air blowing in upon his breast, which was covered with a shirt of the very finest cambric. As the governor entered, the young man turned his head with a look full of indifference; and on recognising Baisemeaux, he arose and saluted him courteously. But when his eyes fell upon Aramis, who remained in the background, the latter trembled, turned pale, and his hat, which he held in his hand, slipped from his fingers as if all his muscles had become relaxed at once. Baisemeaux during this time, accustomed to the presence of his prisoner, did not seem to share any of the sensations which Aramis experienced, but, with all the zeal of a good servant, was arranging on the table the pasty and crawfish which he had brought with him. Occupied in this manner, he did not notice how disturbed his guest had become. When he had finished, however, he turned to the young prisoner and said, "You are looking very well; I am glad to see that."—"Quite well, I thank you, Monsieur," replied the young man.

The effect of the voice was such as almost to overpower Aramis; and involuntarily he made a step forward, his lips trembling. The movement he made was so marked that Baisemeaux, notwithstanding his occupation, could not help observing it. "This gentleman is an architect who has come to examine your chimney," said Baisemeaux; "does it smoke?"—"Never, Monsieur."

"You were saying just now," said the governor to Aramis, rubbing his hands together, "that it is not possible for a man to be happy in prison; here, however, is one who is so." Then turning to the prisoner, he said, "You have nothing to complain of, I hope?"—"Never."—"Do you ever feel low-spirited?" said Aramis.—"Never."—"Ha! ha!" said Baisemeaux, in a low voice; "was I right?"

"Well, my dear Governor, it is impossible not to yield to evidence. Is it allowable to put any questions to him?"—"As many as you like."—"Very well; be good enough to ask him if he knows why he is here."—"Monsieur requests me to ask

you," said Baisemeaux, "if you are aware of the cause of your imprisonment?"—"No, Monsieur," said the young man, unaffectedly, "I am not."

"But that is impossible," said Aramis, carried away by his feelings in spite of himself; "if you were really ignorant of the cause of your detention, you would be furious."—"I was so during the earlier days of my imprisonment."—"Why are you not so now?"—"Because I have reflected."—"That is strange," said Aramis.—"Is it not odd?" said Baisemeaux.

"May one venture to ask you, Monsieur, on what you have reflected?"—"I felt that, as I had committed no crime, Heaven could not punish me."—"What is a prison, then," inquired Aramis, "if it be not a punishment?"—"Alas! I cannot tell," said the young man; "all that I can tell you now is the very opposite of what I felt seven years ago."

"To hear you converse, Monsieur, to witness your resignation, one might almost believe that you liked your imprisonment."—"I endure it."—"In the certainty of recovering your freedom some day, I suppose?"—"I have no certainty. Hope I have, and that is all; and yet I acknowledge that this hope becomes less every day."—"Still, why should you not again be free, since you have already been so?"—"That is precisely the reason," replied the young man, "which prevents me from expecting liberty: why should I have been imprisoned at all, if it had been intended to release me afterwards?"

"How old are you?"—"I do not know."—"What is your name?"—"I have forgotten the name by which I was called."—"Who are your parents?"—"I never knew them."—"But those who brought you up?"—"They did not call me their son."—"Did you ever love any one before coming here?"—"I loved my nurse and my flowers."—"Was that all?"—"I also loved my valet."—"Do you regret your nurse and your valet?"—"I wept very much when they died."

"Did they die since you have been here, or before you came?"—"They died the evening before I was carried off."—"Both at the same time?"—"Yes, both at the same time."—"In what manner were you carried off?"—"A man came for me, made me get into a carriage, which was closed and locked, and brought me here."—"Would you be able to recognise that man again?"—"He was masked."

"Is not this an extraordinary tale?" said Baisemeaux, in a low voice, to Aramis, who could hardly breathe.—"It is indeed extraordinary," murmured Aramis.

"But what is still more extraordinary is that he has never told me so much as he has just told you."—"Perhaps the reason may be that you have never questioned him," said Aramis.—"It is possible," replied Baisemeaux; "I have no curiosity. Well, have you looked at the room; it's a fine one, is it not?"—"Very fine."—"A carpet—"—"Beautiful."

"I'll wager he had nothing like it before he came here."—"I think so too." Then, again turning towards the young man, Aramis asked, "Do you not remember to have been visited, at some time or other, by a strange lady or gentleman?"—"Yes, indeed; thrice by a woman, who each time came to the door in a carriage, and entered covered with a veil, which she only raised when we were together and alone."—"Do you remember that woman?"—"Yes."—"What did she say to you?"

The young man smiled mournfully. "She inquired, as you have just done, if I were happy, and if I were getting weary."—"What did she do on arriving, and on leaving you?"—"She pressed me in her arms, held me in her embrace, and kissed me."—"Do you remember her?"—"Perfectly."—"Do you recall her features distinctly?"—"Yes."—"You would recognise her, then, if accident brought her before you, or led you into her presence?"—"Most certainly."

A flash of fleeting satisfaction passed across Aramis's face. At this moment Baisemeaux heard the jailer coming up again. "Shall we leave?" he said hastily to Aramis. Aramis, who probably had learned all that he cared to know, replied, "When you like."

The young man saw them prepare to leave, and saluted them politely. Baisemeaux replied merely by a nod of the head; while Aramis, with a respect arising doubtless from the sight of such misfortune, saluted the prisoner profoundly. They left the room, Baisemeaux closing the door behind them. "Well," said Baisemeaux, on the staircase, "what do you think of it all?"

"I have discovered the secret, my dear Governor," he said.—"Bah! What is the secret, then?"—"A murder was committed in that house."—"Nonsense!"—"But attend! the valet and the nurse died the same day."—"Well?"—"And by poison."—"Ah!"—"What do you think?"

"That it is very likely to be true— What! that young man is an assassin?"—"Who said that? What makes you think that poor boy could be an assassin?"—"The very thing I was saying."—"The crime was committed in his house, that is all; perhaps he saw the criminals, and it was feared that he might

say something."—"The deuce! if I only thought that—"—"Well?"—"I would increase the watch over him."—"Oh! he does not seem to wish to escape."—"You do not know what prisoners are."

"Has he any books?"—"None; they are strictly prohibited, and by M. Mazarin's own hand."—"Have you the writing still?"—"Yes, Monseigneur; would you like to look at it as you return to get your cloak?"—"I should very much, for I like to look at autographs."—"This one is of the most unquestionable authenticity; there is only one erasure."

"Ah! an erasure; and in what respect?"—"With respect to a figure. At first there was written: 'To be boarded at 50 livres.'"—"Like princes of the blood, in fact?"—"But the cardinal must have seen his mistake, you understand, for he scratched out the zero, and has added a 1 before the 5. But, by the by—"—"What?"

"You do not speak of the resemblance."—"I do not speak of it, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for a very simple reason,—because it does not exist."—"The deuce it doesn't!"—"Or, if it does exist, it is only in your own imagination; but, supposing it were to exist elsewhere, I think you would do well not to speak about it."—"Really."—"The king Louis XIV., you understand, would be mortally angry with you, if he were to learn that you contributed to spread the report that one of his subjects has the effrontery to resemble him."

"It is true, quite true," said Baisemeaux, thoroughly alarmed; "but I have not spoken of the circumstance to any one but yourself, and you understand, Monseigneur, that I perfectly rely on your discretion."—"Oh, be easy!"—"Do you still wish to see the note?" said Baisemeaux, uneasily.—"Certainly."

While conversing thus, they had returned to the governor's apartments. Baisemeaux took from the closet a private register, like the one which he had already shown to Aramis, but fastened by a lock, the key which opened it being one of a small bunch of keys which Baisemeaux always carried with him. Then placing the book upon the table, he opened it at the letter "M," and showed Aramis the following note in the column of observations:—

"NO BOOKS AT ANY TIME; the finest quality of linen and the most elegant clothes; NO EXERCISE; ALWAYS THE SAME JAILER; NO COMMUNICATIONS WITH ANY ONE. Musical instruments; every liberty which his welfare may require; to be boarded at

15 livres. M. de Baisemeaux can claim more, if the 15 livres be not sufficient."

"Ah," said Baisemeaux, "now I think of it, I shall claim it." Aramis shut the book. "Yes," he said, "it is indeed from the hand of M. de Mazarin; I recognise the writing. Now, my dear Governor," he continued, as if this last communication had exhausted his interest, "let us now turn, if you please, to our own little affairs."—"Well, what time for payment do you wish me to take? Fix it yourself."—"We will not fix any particular period; give me a simple acknowledgment for one hundred and fifty thousand livres."—"When to be made payable?"—"At my demand. But you understand, I shall only wish it when you yourself do so."

"Oh, I am quite easy on that score," said Baisemeaux, smiling; "but I have already given you two receipts."—"Which I now destroy," said Aramis; and after having shown the two receipts to the governor, he destroyed them. Overcome by so great a mark of confidence, Baisemeaux unhesitatingly signed an acknowledgment of a debt of one hundred and fifty thousand livres, payable at the pleasure of the prelate. Aramis, who had, by glancing over the governor's shoulder, followed the pen as he wrote, put the acknowledgment into his pocket without seeming to have read it, which made Baisemeaux perfectly easy. "Now," said Aramis, "you would not be angry with me, would you, if I were to carry off one of your prisoners?"

"What do you mean?"—"By obtaining his pardon, of course. Have I not already told you that I took a great interest in poor Seldon?"—"Yes, quite true."—"Well?"—"That is your affair; do as you think proper. I see you have an open hand, and an arm that can reach a great way."—"Adieu, adieu!" and Aramis left, carrying with him the governor's blessings.

CHAPTER C

THE TWO FRIENDS

At the very time when M. de Baisemeaux was showing Aramis the prisoners in the Bastille, a carriage drew up at Madame de Bellière's door, and at that still early hour a young woman alighted, her head muffled in a silk hood. When the servants announced Madame Vanel to Madame de Bellière, the latter

was engaged, or rather was absorbed, in reading a letter, which she hurriedly concealed. She had hardly finished her morning toilette, her women being still in the next room. At the name, at the footsteps, of Marguerite Vanel, Madame de Bellière ran to meet her. She fancied that she could detect in her friend's eye a brightness which was neither that of health nor of pleasure.

Marguerite embraced her, pressed her hands, and hardly allowed her time to speak. "Dearest," she said, "are you forgetting me? Have you quite given yourself up to the pleasures of the court?"—"I have not even seen the marriage *fêtes*."—"What are you doing with yourself, then?"—"I am getting ready to leave for Bellière."—"For Bellière?"—"Yes."

"Rustic in your tastes, then; I delight to see you so disposed. But you are pale."—"No, I am perfectly well."—"So much the better; I was becoming uneasy about you. You do not know what I have been told."—"People say so many things."—"Yes, but this is extraordinary."—"How well you know how to excite curiosity, Marguerite!"—"Well, I was afraid of vexing you."—"Never; you have yourself always admired me for my evenness of temper."—"Well, then, it is said that— Oh, really, I shall never be able to tell you."—"Do not let us talk about it, then," said Madame de Bellière, who detected the ill-nature which was concealed by all these prefaces, yet felt consumed with curiosity.

"Well, then, my dear Marchioness, it is said that for some time past you have mourned much less for poor M. de Bellière."—"It is an ill-natured report, Marguerite. I do mourn, and shall always mourn, my husband; but it is now two years since he died. I am only twenty-eight years old, and my grief at his loss ought not to control every action and thought of my life. You, Marguerite, who are the model of a wife, would not believe me if I were to say so."—"Why not? Your heart is so tender," said Madame Vanel, spitefully.

"Yours is so too, Marguerite, and yet I did not perceive that you allowed yourself to be overcome by grief when your heart was wounded." These words were in direct allusion to Marguerite's rupture with the superintendent, and were also a veiled but direct reproach made against the young woman's heart. As if she only awaited this signal to discharge her shaft, Marguerite exclaimed, "Well, Elise, it is said that you are in love;" and she looked fixedly at Madame de Bellière, who blushed without being able to prevent it.—"Women never

escape slander," replied the marchioness, after a moment's pause.

"Oh! no one slanders you, Elise."—"What! people say that I am in love, and yet they do not slander me!"—"In the first place, if it be true, there is no slander, but simply a piece of gossip. In the next place,—for you did not allow me to finish,—the public does not assert that you have abandoned yourself to this passion. It represents you, on the contrary, as a virtuous but loving woman, defending yourself tooth and nail, shutting yourself up in your own house as in a fortress,—a fortress in other respects as impenetrable as that of Danaë, notwithstanding Danaë's tower was made of brass."—"You are witty, Marguerite," said Madame de Bellière, tremblingly.

"You always flatter me, Elise. To be brief, however, you are reported to be incorruptible and unapproachable. You see whether they calumniate you or not— But what is it you are musing about while I am speaking to you?"—"I?"—"Yes: you are blushing and are quite silent."—"I was trying," said the marchioness, raising her beautiful eyes, brightened with an indication of approaching anger,—"I was trying to discover to what you, who are so learned in mythological subjects, could have alluded in comparing me to Danaë."

"Ah!" said Marguerite, laughing, "you were trying to guess that?"—"Yes; do you not remember that at the convent, when we were solving our problems in mathematics,—ah! what I have to tell you is learned also, but it is my turn,—do you not remember that if one of the terms were given we were to find out the other? Therefore do you guess now?"—"I cannot conjecture what you mean."

"And yet nothing is more simple. You pretend that I am in love, do you not?"—"So it is said."—"Very well; it is not said, I suppose, that I am in love with an abstraction. There must surely be a name mentioned in this report."—"Certainly, a name is mentioned."—"Very well, my dear; it is not surprising, then, that I should try to guess that name, since you do not tell it to me."—"My dear Marchioness, when I saw you blush, I did not think you would have to spend much time in conjectures."

"It was the word 'Danaë' which you used that surprised me. 'Danaë' means a shower of gold, does it not?"—"That is to say that the Jupiter of Danaë changed himself into a shower of gold for her."—"My lover, then,—he whom you assign me—"—"Oh, I beg your pardon; I am your friend, and

assign you no one."—"That may be; but those who are evilly disposed towards me."—"Do you wish to hear the name?"—"I have been waiting this half-hour for it."—"You shall hear it. Do not be shocked! he is a man high in power."—"Good!" said the marchioness, as she clinched her taper fingers like a patient at the approach of the knife.

"He is a very wealthy man," continued Marguerite; "the wealthiest, it may be. In a word, it is—" The marchioness closed her eyes for a moment. "It is the Duke of Buckingham," said Marguerite, bursting into laughter. The perfidiousness had been calculated with extreme ability; the name that was pronounced, instead of the name which the marchioness awaited, had precisely the same effect upon the poor woman as the badly sharpened axes which had hacked without killing Messieurs de Chalais and de Thou on their scaffolds had upon them. She recovered himself, however, and said: "I was perfectly right in calling you a witty woman, for you are making the time pass most agreeably. The joke is a most amusing one, for I have never seen the Duke of Buckingham."—"Never?" said Marguerite, restraining her laughter.

"I have never even left my own house since the duke has been at Paris."—"Oh!" resumed Madame Vanel, stretching out her unruly foot towards a paper which was rustling on the carpet near the window; "it is not necessary for people to see each other, since they can write." The marchioness trembled, for this paper was the envelope of the letter she was reading as her friend had entered. That envelope was sealed with the superintendent's arms. As she leaned back upon her sofa, Madame de Bellière covered the paper with the thick folds of her flowing silk dress, and so concealed it. Then she said, "Come, Marguerite, was it to tell me all these foolish things that you have come to see me so early in the day?"

"No; I came to see you, in the first place, and to remind you of those habits of our earlier days, so delightful to remember, you know, when we used to wander about together at Vincennes, and sitting beneath an oak or in some coppice used to talk of those whom we loved and who loved us."—"Do you propose that we should go out together now?"—"My carriage is here, and I have three hours at my disposal."—"I am not dressed yet, Marguerite; but if you wish that we should talk together, we can, without going to the woods of Vincennes, find, in my own garden here, beautiful trees, shady hedges, a greensward

covered with daisies and violets, the perfume of which can be perceived where we are sitting."

"I regret your refusal, my dear Marchioness, for I wanted to pour out my whole heart into yours."—"I repeat again, Marguerite, my heart is yours just as much in this room, or beneath the lime-trees in my garden here, as it is under the oaks in the wood yonder."—"It is not the same thing for me. In approaching nearer to Vincennes, Marchioness, my ardent aspirations approach nearer to that object towards which they have for some days past been directed." The marchioness suddenly raised her head. "Are you surprised, then, that I am still thinking of St. Mandé?"

"Of St. Mandé!" exclaimed Madame de Bellière; and the glances of the two women met each other like two unquiet swords at the beginning of a combat.—"You, so proud too?" said the marchioness, disdainfully.—"I, so proud!" replied Madame Vanel. "Such is my nature. I do not forgive neglect; I cannot endure infidelity. When I leave any one and he weeps, I feel induced still to love him; but when others forsake me and laugh at their infidelity, I love distractedly."

Madame de Bellière could not restrain an involuntary movement. "She is jealous," said Marguerite to herself.—"Then," continued the marchioness, "you are quite enamoured of the Duke of Buckingham,—I mean of M. Fouquet?" She felt the blow, and all her blood seemed to have flowed towards her heart. "And you wished to go to Vincennes,—to St. Mandé even?"

"I hardly know what I wished; you would have advised me perhaps."—"In what respect?"—"You have often done so."—"Most certainly I should not have done so in the present instance, for I do not forgive as you do. I am less loving, perhaps; but when my heart has been once wounded, it remains so always."—"But M. Fouquet has not wounded you," said Marguerite Vanel, with the most perfect simplicity.

"You perfectly understand what I mean. M. Fouquet has not wounded me; he is not known to me either by any favour or by any injury. But you have reason to complain of him; you are my friend, and I am afraid I should not advise you as you would like."—"Ah! you are prejudging the case."—"The sighs you spoke of just now are more than indications."—"You overwhelm me," said the young woman suddenly, as if collecting her whole strength, like a wrestler preparing for a last struggle; "you take only my wicked passions and my weaknesses into account, and do not speak of the pure and generous

feelings which I have. If at this moment I feel attracted towards Monsieur the Superintendent, if I even make an advance to him,—which I confess is very probable,—my motive for it is that M. Fouquet's fate deeply affects me, and that he is, in my opinion, one of the most unfortunate men living."

"Ah!" said the marchioness, placing her hand upon her heart; "something new, then, has occurred?"—"Do you not know it?"—"I do not know anything about him," said Madame de Bellière, with that palpitation of anguish which suspends thought and speech, and even life itself.

"My dear, in the first place, the king's favour is entirely withdrawn from M. Fouquet, and conferred on M. Colbert."—"Yes, so they say."—"It is very clear, since the discovery of the plot at Belle-Isle."—"I was told that the discovery of the fortifications there had turned out to M. Fouquet's honour." Marguerite began to laugh in so cruel a manner that Madame de Bellière could at that moment have joyfully plunged a dagger in Marguerite's bosom. "Dearest," continued Marguerite, "there is no longer any question of M. Fouquet's honour; his safety is concerned. Before three days are past the ruin of the superintendent will be complete."

"Stay!" said the marchioness, in her turn smiling; "that is going a little too fast."—"I said three days, because I wish to delude myself with a hope; but most certainly the catastrophe is not twenty-four hours distant."—"Why so?"—"For the simplest of all reasons,—that M. Fouquet has no more money."

"In matters of finance, my dear Marguerite, some are without money to-day who to-morrow can procure millions."—"That might be M. Fouquet's case when he had two wealthy and clever friends who amassed money for him and wrung it from every source; but these friends are dead."—"Money does not die, Marguerite: it may be concealed, but it can be looked for; it can be bought or found."—"You see things on the bright side, and so much the better for you. It is really very unfortunate that you are not the Egeria of M. Fouquet; you might show him the source whence he could obtain the millions for which the king asked him yesterday."—"Millions!" said the marchioness, in terror.

"Four,—an even number."—"Infamous!" murmured Madame de Bellière, tortured by that brutal pleasantry. "M. Fouquet, I should think, must certainly have four millions," she replied courageously.

"If he has those which the king requires to-day," said

Marguerite, "he will not perhaps possess those which the king will require of him in a month."—"The king will require money from him again?"—"No doubt; and that is my reason for saying that the ruin of this poor M. Fouquet is inevitable. Pride will induce him to furnish the money; and when he has no more he will fall."

"It is true," said the marchioness, tremblingly; "the plan is a bold one. But tell me, does M. Colbert hate M. Fouquet so very much?"—"I think he does not like him. Now, M. de Colbert is powerful: he improves on close acquaintance; he has gigantic ideas, a strong will, and discretion; he will make great strides."—"He will be superintendent?"—"It is probable. Such is the reason, my dear Marchioness, why I felt myself impressed in favour of that poor man who once loved, nay, even adored me; and why, when I see him so unfortunate, I forgive his infidelity, which I have reason to believe he also regrets; and why, moreover, I should not have been disinclined to afford him some consolation or some good advice,—he would have understood the advance, and would have thought kindly of me for it. It is gratifying to be loved, you know. Men value love highly when they are no longer blinded by its influence."

The marchioness, bewildered and overcome by these cruel attacks, which had been calculated with the correctness and precision of aim of a discharge of artillery, hardly knew what answer to return; she even seemed to have lost all power of thought. Her perfidious friend's voice had assumed the most affectionate tone; she spoke as a woman, but concealed the instincts of a panther. "Well," said Madame de Bellière, who had a vague hope that Marguerite would cease to overwhelm a vanquished enemy, "why do you not go and see M. Fouquet?"—"Decidedly, Marchioness, you have made me reflect. No, it would be unbecoming for me to make the first advance. M. Fouquet no doubt loves me, but he is too proud. I cannot expose myself to an affront,—besides, I have my husband to consider. You say nothing to me. Very well; I shall consult M. Colbert on the subject." And she rose smilingly, as though to take leave; but the marchioness had not the strength to imitate her. Marguerite advanced a few paces, in order that she might continue to enjoy the humiliating grief in which her rival was plunged, and then said suddenly, "You do not accompany me to the door, then?"

The marchioness rose, pale and almost lifeless, without thinking any longer of the envelope, which had occupied her attention

so much at the beginning of the conversation, and which was revealed at the first step she took. She then opened the door of her oratory, and without even turning her head towards Marguerite Vanel, entered it, closing the door after her. Marguerite said, or rather muttered, a few words, which Madame de Bellière did not even hear. As soon, however, as the marchioness had disappeared, her envious enemy, not being able to resist the desire to satisfy herself that her suspicions were well grounded, advanced stealthily like a panther, and seized the envelope. "Ah!" said she, gnashing her teeth, "it was indeed a letter from M. Fouquet that she was reading when I arrived;" and then she too darted out of the room.

During this interval the marchioness, having arrived behind the rampart as it were of her door, felt that her strength was failing her; for a moment she remained rigid, pale, and motionless as a statue, and then, like a statue shaken on its base by a storm of wind, tottered and fell inanimate on the carpet. The noise of the fall resounded just as the rolling of Marguerite's carriage leaving the hotel was heard.

CHAPTER CI

MADAME DE BELLIÈRE'S PLATE

The blow had been the more painful because it was unexpected. It was some time before the marchioness recovered; but once recovered, she began to reflect upon the events which had been announced to her. She returned, at the risk even of losing her life in that way, to that train of ideas which her relentless friend had forced her to pursue. Treason, then,—dark menaces concealed under the semblance of public interest,—such were Colbert's manœuvres. An invidious delight at an approaching downfall, untiring efforts to attain this object, seductions no less wicked than the crime itself,—these gave occupation to Marguerite. The crooked atoms of Descartes triumphed; to the man without compassion was united a woman without heart. The marchioness perceived, with sorrow rather than with indignation, that the king was an accomplice in a plot which savoured of the duplicity of Louis XIII. in his advanced age, and of the avarice of Mazarin at a period of life when he had not had the opportunity of gorging himself with French gold. But the spirit of this courageous woman soon resumed all its

energy, and abandoned retrospective lamentation. The marchioness was not one to weep when it was necessary to act, nor to waste time in bewailing a misfortune when there were still means of relieving it. For ten minutes or more she buried her face in her icy hands, and then, raising her head, rang for her attendants with a steady hand and with a gesture full of energy. Her resolution was taken. "Is everything prepared for my departure?" she inquired of one of her maids who entered.

"Yes, Madame; but it was not expected that your Ladyship would leave for Bellière for the next few days."—"All my jewels and articles of value, however, are locked up?"—"Yes, Madame; but hitherto we have been in the habit of leaving them in Paris. Your Ladyship does not generally take your jewels with you into the country."—"But they are all in order, you say?"—"Yes, in your Ladyship's own room."—"The gold plate?"—"In the chest."—"And the silver plate?"—"In the large oaken closet." The marchioness was silent, and then said calmly, "Let my goldsmith be sent for."

Her attendants vanished to execute the order. The marchioness, however, entered her own room, and inspected her casket of jewels with the greatest attention. Never until now had she bestowed so much attention upon valuables in which women take so much pride; never until now had she looked at her jewels, except for the purpose of making a selection according to the settings, or their colours. On this occasion, however, she admired the size of the rubies and the brilliancy of the diamonds; she grieved over every blemish and every defect; she thought the gold light, and the stones wretched.

The goldsmith, as he entered, found the marchioness thus occupied. "M. Faucheux," she said, "I believe that you supplied me with my gold service?"—"Yes, Madame the Marchioness."—"I do not now remember the amount of the bill."—"Of the new service, Madame, or of that which M. de Bellière presented to you on your marriage?—for I furnished both."

"Well, first of all, the new one."—"Madame, the ewers, the goblets, and the dishes, with their covers, the epergne, the ice-pails, the dishes for the preserves, and the urns cost your Ladyship sixty thousand livres."—"*Mon Dieu!* No more?"—"Your Ladyship thought my bill very large."—"Yes, yes. I remember, in fact, that it was dear: but it was the workmanship, I suppose?"—"Yes, Madame; the designs, the chasings, and new patterns."

"What proportion of the cost does the workmanship form? Do not hesitate to tell me."—"A third of its value, Madame. But—"—"There is the other service,—the old one, that which belonged to my husband?"—"Yes, Madame; there is less workmanship in that than in the one I just mentioned. Its intrinsic value does not exceed thirty thousand livres."

"Seventy thousand," murmured the marchioness; "but, M. Faucheux, there is also the silver service which belonged to my mother,—all that massive plate, you know, which I did not wish to part with on account of the associations connected with it."—"Ah! Madame, that would indeed be an excellent resource for those who, unlike your Ladyship, might not be in a position to keep their plate. At that time, Madame, they made nothing light as they do to-day. In working that, they worked in solid metal. But that service is no longer in fashion. Its weight is its only advantage."—"That is all I care about. How much does it weigh?"—"Fifty thousand livres at the very least. I do not allude to the enormous vases for the buffet, each of which weighs five thousand livres, or both of them ten thousand."

"One hundred and thirty," murmured the marchioness. "You are quite sure of your figures, M. Faucheux?"—"Positive, Madame. Besides, there is no difficulty in weighing them."—"The amount is entered on my books."—"Your Ladyship is extremely methodical, I am aware."

"Let us now turn to another subject," said Madame de Bellière; and she opened one of her jewel-boxes.—"I recognise these emeralds," said the dealer; "for it was I who had the setting of them. They are the most beautiful in the whole court. No, I am mistaken. Madame de Châtillon has the most beautiful set; she had them from Messieurs de Guise: but your set, Madame, are next."—"What are they worth?"—"Mounted?"—"No; supposing I wished to sell them."—"I know very well who would buy them," exclaimed M. Faucheux.

"That is the very thing I ask. They would be purchased, then?"—"All your jewels would be bought, Madame. It is well known that you possess the most beautiful jewels in Paris. You are not changeable in your tastes; when you make a purchase it is of the very best, and what you purchase you do not part with."—"What could these emeralds be sold for, then?"—"A hundred and thirty thousand livres."

The marchioness wrote down upon her tablets with a pencil

the amount which the jeweller mentioned. "This ruby necklace?" she said.—"Are they balas-rubies, Madame?"—"Here they are."—"They are beautiful, magnificent. I did not know you had these stones, Madame."—"What is their value?"—"Two hundred thousand livres. The stone in the centre is alone worth a hundred."—"Yes, yes; that is what I thought," said the marchioness. "As for diamonds, I have them in great numbers,—rings, necklaces, pendants, sprigs, ear-rings, clasps. Tell me their value, M. Faucheux."

The jeweller took his magnifying-glass and scales, weighed and inspected them, and then silently made his calculations. "These stones," he said, "must have cost your Ladyship an income of forty thousand livres."—"You value them at eight hundred thousand livres?"—"Nearly so."—"It is about what I imagined; but the settings are not included."—"As is usual, Madame; but if I were called upon to sell or to buy, I should be satisfied with the gold of the settings alone as my profit upon the transaction. I should make a good twenty-five thousand livres."—"An agreeable sum."—"Yes, Madame, very agreeable."—"Will you accept that profit, then, on condition of converting the jewels into money?"

"But you do not intend to sell your diamonds, I suppose, Madame?" exclaimed the bewildered jeweller.—"Silence, M. Faucheux! Do not disturb yourself about that; give me an answer simply. You are an honourable man, with whom my family has dealt for thirty years; you have known my father and mother, whom your own father and mother had served. I address you as a friend; will you accept the gold of the settings in return for a sum of ready money to be placed in my hands?"

"Eight hundred thousand livres! it is enormous."—"I know it."—"It will be impossible to find it."—"Oh, I trust not!"—"But think, Madame, of the effect which will be produced in society by the report of the sale of your jewels."—"No one need know it. You can get sets of false jewels made for me similar to the real. Do not answer a word; I insist upon it. Sell them separately; sell the stones only!"

"In that way it is easy. Monsieur is looking out for some sets of jewels as well as single stones, for Madame's toilet. There will be a competition for them. I can easily dispose of six hundred thousand livres' worth to Monsieur. I am certain yours are the most beautiful."—"When can you do so?"—"Within three days."—"Very well; the remainder you will dispose of

among private individuals. For the present make me out a contract of sale, payment to be made in four days."

"Madame, Madame, reflect, I entreat you; if you force the sale, you will lose a hundred thousand livres."—"If necessary, I will lose two hundred; I wish everything to be settled this evening. Do you accept?"—"I do, Madame the Marchioness. I will not conceal from you that I shall make five thousand pistoles by the transaction."—"So much the better. In what way shall I have the money?"—"Either in gold, or in bills of the Bank of Lyons, payable at M. Colbert's."

"I agree," said the marchioness, eagerly; "return home and bring the sum in question in notes, as soon as possible, do you understand?"—"Yes, Madame, but for Heaven's sake—"—"Not a word, M. Faucheux! By the by, I was forgetting the silver plate. What is the value of that which I have?"—"Fifty thousand livres, Madame."

"That makes a million," said the marchioness to herself. "M. Faucheux, you will take away with you both the gold and the silver plate. I can assign, as a pretext, that I wish it remodelled for patterns more in accordance with my own taste. Melt it down, I say, and return me its value in gold at once."—"It shall be done, Madame the Marchioness."—"You will be good enough to place the money in a chest, and direct one of your clerks to accompany the chest, and without my servants seeing him; and direct him also to wait for me in a carriage."—"In Madame de Faucheux's carriage?" said the jeweller.

"If you will allow it; and I will call for it at your house."—"Certainly, Madame the Marchioness."—"I will direct three of my servants to convey the plate to your house." The marchioness rang. "Let the small van be placed at M. Faucheux's disposal," she said. The jeweller bowed and left the house, directing that the van should follow him closely, saying aloud that the marchioness was about to have her plate melted down in order to have other plate manufactured of a more modern style.

Three hours afterwards the marchioness went to M. Faucheux's house, and received from him eight hundred thousand livres in bills on the Bank of Lyons, and two hundred and fifty thousand livres in gold enclosed in a chest, which one of the clerks could hardly carry to Madame Faucheux's carriage,—for Madame Faucheux kept her carriage. As the daughter of a president of accounts, she had brought a marriage portion of thirty thousand crowns to her husband, who was syndic of the goldsmiths.

These thirty thousand crowns had become very fruitful during twenty years. The jeweller, though a millionaire, was a modest man. He had purchased a venerable carriage, built in 1648, ten years after the king's birth. This carriage, or rather house upon wheels, excited the admiration of the whole quarter; it was covered with allegorical paintings, and with clouds scattered over with stars of gold and silver gilt.

The noble lady entered this somewhat grotesque vehicle, sitting opposite to the clerk, who endeavoured to put his knees out of the way, afraid even of touching the marchioness's dress. It was the clerk, too, who told the coachman, who was very proud of having a marchioness to drive, to take the road to St. Mandé.

CHAPTER CII

THE DOWRY

M. FAUCHEUX's horses were respectable Percheron animals, with thick knees and legs which they had some difficulty in moving. Like the carriage, they dated from the earlier part of the century. They were not as fleet, therefore, as M. Fouquet's English horses, and consequently covered two hours in going to St. Mandé. Their progress, it might be said, was majestic. Majesty, however, precludes hurry. The marchioness stopped the carriage before a door well known to her, although she had seen it only once, under circumstances, it will be remembered, no less painful than that which brought her to it again on this second occasion. She drew a key from her pocket, and inserted it in the lock with her small white hand, pushed open the door, which noiselessly yielded to her touch, and directed the clerk to carry the chest upstairs to the first floor. The weight of the chest was so great that the clerk was obliged to get the coachman to assist him with it. They placed it in a small cabinet, anteroom, or boudoir rather, adjoining the salon where we once saw M. Fouquet at the marchioness's feet. Madame de Bellière gave the coachman a louis, and the clerk a charming smile, and dismissed them both. She closed the door after them, and waited thus, alone and shut in. There was no servant to be seen about the rooms, but everything was prepared as though some invisible genius had divined the wishes and desires of the guest who was expected. The fire was laid; there were candles in the candelabra, refreshments upon the sideboard, books upon the

tables, and fresh-cut flowers in Japanese vases. One might almost have declared it to be an enchanted house.

The marchioness lighted the candles, inhaled the perfume of the flowers, sat down, and was soon plunged in profound reverie. Her deep musings, however, melancholy though they were, were not untinged with a certain sweetness. She saw displayed before her in that room a treasure,—a million which she had wrung from her fortune as a gleaner plucks the blue cornflower from her crown of flowers. She conjured up the sweetest dreams. Her principal thought, and one that took precedence of all others, was to devise means of leaving this money for M. Fouquet without his possibly learning from whom the gift had come. This idea naturally enough was the first to present itself to her mind; but although on reflection it appeared difficult to carry out, she did not despair of success. She would, then, ring to summon M. Fouquet, and make her escape, happier than if, instead of having given a million, she had herself found it. But being there, and having seen the boudoir so coquettishly decorated that it might almost be said that the last particle of dust had but the moment before been removed by the servants; having observed the drawing-room so perfectly arranged that it might almost be said that her presence there had driven away the fairies who were its occupants,—she asked herself if the glance or gaze of those whom she had driven away—whether spirits, fairies, elves, or human creatures—had not already recognised her. In that case Fouquet would know all; what he might not know, he would guess: he would refuse to accept as a gift what he might perhaps have accepted under the name of a loan, and thus the enterprise would end in failure. To secure success, it was necessary, then, that some steps should be seriously taken; and it was necessary, also, that the superintendent should comprehend the seriousness of his position, in order to yield compliance with the generous caprice of a woman. All the fascinations of an eloquent friendship would be required to persuade him; and should this be insufficient, all the intoxicating influence of an ardent love, which in its resolute determination to carry conviction nothing would turn aside. Was not the superintendent, indeed, known for his delicacy and dignity of feeling? Would he allow himself to accept from any woman that of which she had robbed herself? No, he would resist; and if any voice in the world could overcome his resistance, it would be the voice of the woman he loved.

Another doubt, and that a cruel one, suggested itself to

Madame de Bellière with a sharp, acute pain, like a dagger-thrust. Did he really love her? Would that volatile mind, that inconstant heart, be likely to be fixed for a moment, even were it to gaze upon an angel? Was it not with Fouquet, notwithstanding his genius and his uprightness of conduct, as with those conquerors on the field of battle who shed tears when they have gained a victory? "I must learn whether it be so, and must judge of that for myself," said the marchioness. "Who can tell whether that heart, so coveted, is not common in its impulses and full of alloy? Who can tell whether that mind, when the touchstone is applied to it, will not be found of a mean and vulgar character? Come, come!" she exclaimed; "this is doubting and hesitating too much. To the proof!" She looked at the timepiece. "It is now seven o'clock," she said; "he must have arrived: it is the hour for signing his papers. Now, then!" And rising with a feverish impatience, she walked to the mirror, into which she smiled with a resolute smile of devotion. She touched the spring and drew out the handle of the bell; then, as if exhausted beforehand by the struggle which she had just undergone, she threw herself in utter abandonment upon her knees before a large couch, and buried her face in her trembling hands. Ten minutes afterward she heard the spring of the door grate.

The door moved upon its invisible hinges, and Fouquet appeared. He looked pale, and seemed bowed down by the weight of some bitter reflection. He did not hurry, but simply came at the summons. The preoccupation of his mind must indeed have been very great, since, devotee of pleasure as he was, he obeyed such a summons so listlessly. The previous night, in fact, fertile in melancholy ideas, had sharpened his features, generally so noble in their indifference of expression, and had traced dark lines around his eyes. Handsome and noble he still was; and the melancholy expression of his mouth —an expression so rare with him—gave a new character to his countenance, by which his youth seemed to be renewed. Dressed in black, the lace on his breast all disarranged by his restless hand, the superintendent fixed his eyes, full of reverie, upon the threshold of the room which he had so frequently approached in search of expected happiness. This gloomy gentleness of manner, this smiling sadness of expression, which had replaced his former excessive joy, produced an indescribable effect upon Madame de Bellière, who was regarding him at a distance.

A woman's eye can read the face of the man she loves,—its

every feeling of pride, its every expression of suffering; it might almost be said that Heaven has graciously accorded to women, by reason of their very weakness, more than is granted to other creatures. They can conceal their own feelings from a man, but from them no man can conceal his. The marchioness divined in a single glance all the unhappiness of the superintendent. She divined a night passed without sleep, a day passed in disappointments. From that moment she was firm in her own strength, and she felt that she loved Fouquet beyond everything else. She rose and approached him, saying, "You wrote to me this morning to say that you were beginning to forget me, and that I, whom you had not seen lately, had no doubt ceased to think of you. I have come to undeceive you, Monsieur; and the more completely so, because there is one thing I can read in your eyes."—"What is that, Madame?" asked Fouquet, astonished.

"That is, that you have never loved me so much as at this moment; in the same manner you can read, in my present step towards you, that I have not forgotten you."—"Oh, Marchioness," said Fouquet, whose noble face was for a moment lighted up by a sudden gleam of joy, "you are indeed an angel, and no man can suspect you. All he can do is to humble himself before you and entreat forgiveness."

"Your forgiveness is granted, then." Fouquet was about to throw himself upon his knees. "No, no!" she said; "sit here, by my side. Ah, that is an evil thought which has just crossed your mind!"—"How do you detect it, Madame?"—"By your smile, which has just injured the expression of your countenance. Be candid, and tell me what your thought was. No secrets between friends!"

"Tell me, then, Madame, why have you been so harsh for these three or four months past?"—"Harsh?"—"Yes; did you not forbid me to visit you?"—"Alas! my friend," said Madame de Bellière, sighing deeply, "it is because your visit to me caused you a great misfortune; because my house is watched; because the same eyes which have already seen you might see you again; because I think it less dangerous for you that I should come here than that you should come to my house; in short, because I find you so unhappy that I am not willing to add to your misfortunes."

Fouquet started; for these words recalled all the anxieties connected with his office of superintendent,—to him who for the last few minutes had entertained only the hopes of the lover.

"I unhappy?" he said, endeavouring to smile; "indeed, Marchioness, you will almost make me believe that I am so, by your own sadness. Are those beautiful eyes raised upon me merely in pity? Oh, I am hoping for another expression from them!"—"It is not I who am sad, Monsieur. Look in the mirror there! It is you who are so."

"It is true that I am somewhat pale, Marchioness; but it is from overwork. The king yesterday required a supply of money from me."—"Yes,—four millions; I know that."—"You know it?" exclaimed Fouquet, surprised; "and how do you know it? It was only at the card-party, after the departure of the queen, and in the presence of one person only, that the king—"—"You perceive that I do know it; is not that sufficient? Well, go on, Monsieur! The money the king has required you to supply—"

"You understand, Marchioness, that I have been obliged to procure it, then to get it counted, afterwards registered,—altogether a long affair. Since M. de Mazarin's death, financial affairs occasion some little fatigue and embarrassment. My administration is somewhat overtaxed, and that is the reason why I have not slept during the past night."—"Then you have the amount?" inquired the marchioness, with some anxiety.

"It would indeed be strange, Marchioness," replied Fouquet, cheerfully, "if a superintendent of finances were not to have a paltry four millions in his coffers."—"Yes, yes, I believe you either have or will have them."—"What do you mean by saying that I shall have them?"—"It is not very long since you were required to furnish two millions."—"On the contrary, to me it seems almost an age, Marchioness; but do not let us talk of money matters any longer, if you please."—"On the contrary, we will continue to speak of them, for that is my only reason for coming to see you."—"I am at a loss to know your meaning," said the superintendent, whose eyes began to express an anxious curiosity.

"Tell me, Monsieur, is the office of superintendent an irremovable one?"—"You surprise me, Marchioness, for you speak as if you had an interest in the business."—"My reason is simple enough. I am desirous of placing some money in your hands, and naturally I wish to know whether you are certain of your post."—"Really, Marchioness, I am at a loss what to reply, and I cannot conceive your meaning."—"Seriously, then, my dear M. Fouquet, I have certain funds which somewhat embarrass me. I am tired of investing my money in land, and am

anxious to give it in charge to some friend who will turn it to account."

"Surely the matter is not pressing," said M. Fouquet.—"On the contrary, it is very pressing."—"Very well, we will talk of that by and by."—"By and by will not do, for my money is there," returned the marchioness, pointing out the coffer to the superintendent, and showing him, as she opened it, the bundles of notes and heaps of gold.

Fouquet, who had risen from his seat at the same moment as Madame de Bellière, remained for a moment plunged in thought; then, suddenly starting back, he turned pale, and sank down in his chair, concealing his face in his hands. "Marchioness, Marchioness," he murmured, "what opinion can you have of me when you make me such an offer?"—"Of you!" returned the marchioness. "Tell me, rather, what you yourself think of it."

"You bring me this money for myself, and you bring it because you know me to be embarrassed. Nay, do not deny it, for I am sure of it. Do I not know your heart?"—"If you know my heart, then, can you not see that it is my heart which I offer you?"—"I have guessed rightly, then!" exclaimed Fouquet. "In truth, Madame, I have never yet given you the right to insult me in this manner."

"Insult you!" she said, turning pale; "what singular delicacy of feeling! You love me, you have said. In the name of that love you have asked me to sacrifice my reputation and my honour; yet when I offer you my money, which is my own, you refuse me."—"Marchioness, you were at liberty to preserve what you term your reputation and your honour. Allow me the liberty of preserving mine. Leave me to my ruin,—leave me to sink beneath the weight of the hatreds which surround me, beneath the faults I have committed, beneath the load even of my remorse; but, for Heaven's sake, Marchioness, do not crush me under this last infliction."—"A short time ago, M. Fouquet, you were wanting in judgment; now you are wanting in feeling."

Fouquet pressed his clinched hand upon his heaving breast, saying, "Overwhelm me, Madame! I have nothing to reply."—"I offered you my friendship, M. Fouquet."—"Yes, Madame, but you limited yourself to that."—"And what I am now doing is the act of a friend."—"No doubt it is."—"And you reject this mark of my friendship?"—"I do reject it."—"M. Fouquet, look at me!" said the marchioness, with glistening eyes; "I now offer you my love."—"Oh, Madame!" exclaimed Fouquet.

"I have loved you for a long while past: women, like men, have a false delicacy at times. For a long time past I have loved you, but would not confess it."—"Oh!" said Fouquet, clasping his hands.

"Well, then, you have implored this love on your knees, and I have refused you. I was blind, as you were a little while since; but as it was my love that you sought, it is my love that I now offer you."—"Yes, your love, but your love only."—"My love, my person, my life! All, all, all!"—"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Fouquet, dazzled.

"Do you wish my love?"—"Oh, you overwhelm me beneath the weight of my happiness!"—"Will you be happy, then, if I am yours,—yours entirely?"—"It will be the supremest happiness for me."

"Take me, then! If, however, for your sake I sacrifice a prejudice, do you, for mine, sacrifice a scruple."—"Madame, Madame, do not tempt me!"—"My friend, my friend, do not refuse me."—"Think seriously of what you are proposing."—"Fouquet, but one word! Let it be 'No,' and I open this door,"—and she pointed to that which led into the street,—"and you will never see me again. Let that word be 'Yes,' and I am yours entirely."

"Élise! Élise! But this coffer?"—"It contains my dowry."—"It is your ruin!" exclaimed Fouquet, turning over the gold and papers; "there must be a million here."—"Yes,—my jewels, for which I care no longer if you do not love me, and for which, equally, I care no longer if you love me as I love you."

"This is too much!" exclaimed Fouquet. "I yield, I yield, even were it only to consecrate such devotion. I accept the dowry."—"And take the woman with it," said the marchioness, throwing herself into his arms.

CHAPTER CIII

GOD'S TERRITORY

During the progress of these events Buckingham and De Wardes were travelling like boon companions, and made the journey from Paris to Calais in perfect harmony. Buckingham had hurried his departure, so that the best part of his adieux were very hastily made. His visit to Monsieur and Madame, to the young queen and to the queen-dowager, had been paid collectively,—a precaution on the part of the queen-mother,

which saved him the distress of any further private conversation with Monsieur, and saved him also from the danger of seeing Madame again. Buckingham embraced De Guiche and Raoul; he assured the former of his high regard for him, and the latter of a firm friendship capable of triumphing over all obstacles and remaining unshaken by distance or lapse of time. The carriages containing the luggage had already been sent on ahead, and in the evening he set off in his travelling-carriage with his attendants.

De Wardes, irritated at finding himself dragged away in tow, so to speak, by this Englishman, had sought in his subtle mind for some means of escaping from his fetters; but no one having rendered him any assistance, he was absolutely obliged to endure the burden of his own evil thoughts and of his own caustic spirit. Those of his friends in whom he had been able to confide had, in their character of wits, rallied him upon the duke's superiority. Others, less brilliant but more sensible, had reminded him of the king's orders, which prohibited duelling. Others, again,—and they the larger number,—who from Christian charity or national vanity might have rendered him assistance, did not care to run the risk of incurring disgrace, and would, at the best, have informed the ministers of a departure which might end in a massacre on a small scale. The result was that after having fully deliberated upon the matter, De Wardes packed up his luggage, took a couple of horses, and, followed only by one servant, made his way towards the barrier, where Buckingham's carriage was to await him.

The duke received his adversary as he would have received an intimate acquaintance, made room beside him on the same seat with himself, offered him sweetmeats, and spread over his knees the sable cloak which had been thrown upon the front seat. They then conversed of the court, without alluding to Madame; of Monsieur, without speaking of his domestic affairs; of the king, without speaking of his brother's wife; of the queen-mother, without alluding to her daughter-in-law; of the King of England, without alluding to his sister; of the state of the affections of each of the travellers, without pronouncing any name that might be dangerous.

In this way the journey, which was performed by short stages, was most agreeable; and Buckingham, almost a Frenchman in wit and education, was delighted at having so admirably selected his travelling companion. Elegant repasts, of which they partook but lightly; trials of horses in the beautiful meadows which

skirted the road; coursing,—for Buckingham had his greyhounds with him,—in such employments did they pass away the time. The duke somewhat resembled the beautiful river Seine, which encloses France a thousand times in its loving embraces before deciding to join its waters with the ocean. But in quitting France, it was her recently adopted daughter whom he had brought to Paris that he chiefly regretted; his every thought was a remembrance of her, and consequently a regret. Therefore, whenever now and then, despite his command over himself, he was lost in thought, De Wardes left him entirely to his musings. This delicacy would certainly have touched Buckingham and changed his feelings towards De Wardes, if the latter, while preserving silence, had shown a glance less full of malice and a smile less false. Instinctive dislikes, however, are relentless,—nothing appeases them; a few ashes may sometimes cover them up, but beneath those ashes the smothered flames rage more furiously. After having exhausted all the means of amusement which the route offered, they arrived, as we have said, at Calais towards the end of the sixth day. The duke's attendants had arrived the evening before, and had chartered a boat for the purpose of joining the yacht, which had been tacking about in sight, or lying broadside on, whenever it felt its white wings wearied, within two or three cannon-shots from the jetty.

The boat was destined for the transport of the duke's equipment from the shore to the yacht. The horses had been shipped, having been hoisted from the boat upon the deck of the vessel in baskets, expressly made for the purpose, and wadded in such a manner that their limbs, even in the most violent fits of terror or impatience, were always protected by the soft support which the sides afforded, and not a hair was turned. Eight of these baskets, placed side by side, filled the ship's hold. It is well known that in short voyages horses, with the best of food before them, such as they would have coveted on land, refuse to eat, but remain trembling all the while.

By degrees the duke's entire equipage was transported on board the yacht. His men then came to inform him that everything was in readiness, and that they only waited for him, whenever he would be disposed to embark with the French gentleman; for no one supposed that the French gentleman would have any other accounts to settle with my lord duke than those of friendship. Buckingham desired the captain of the yacht to be told to hold himself in readiness, but that, as the sea was

beautiful, and as the day promised a splendid sunset, he did not intend to go on board until nightfall, and would avail himself of the evening to enjoy a walk on the strand. He added, also, that, finding himself in such excellent company, he had not the least desire to hasten his embarkation. As he said this, he pointed out to those who surrounded him the magnificent spectacle which the sky presented, of a deep purple colour in the horizon, and an amphitheatre of fleecy clouds ascending from the sun's disk to the zenith, assuming the appearance of a range of mountains whose summits were heaped one upon another. The whole amphitheatre was tinged at its base by a kind of blood-like foam, fading away towards the summit into opal and pearl-like tints. The sea, too, was tinged with the same reflection, and upon the crest of every azure wave danced a point of light, like a ruby exposed to the reflection of a lamp. The mildness of the evening: the smell of the sea, so dear to contemplative minds; a stiff breeze setting in from the east and blowing in harmonious gusts; in the distance the black outline of the yacht with its rigging traced upon the empurpled background of the sky; here and there on the horizon lateen-sails bending over the blue sea, like the wings of a sea-gull about to plunge,—all contributed to a spectacle which indeed well merited admiration.

A crowd of curious idlers followed the richly dressed attendants, among whom they mistook the steward and the secretary for the master and his friend. Buckingham, dressed very simply in a grey satin vest and doublet of violet-coloured velvet, wearing his hat drawn over his eyes, and without orders or embroidery, was taken no more notice of than was De Wardes, who was dressed in black like an attorney. The duke's attendants had received directions to keep a boat in readiness at the jetty-head, and to watch the embarkation of their master, without approaching him until either he or his friend should summon them,—"whatever may happen," he had added, laying a stress upon these words, so that they might not be misunderstood.

Having walked a few paces upon the strand, Buckingham said to De Wardes: "I think, Monsieur, it is now time to take leave of each other. The tide, you perceive, is rising; ten minutes hence it will have soaked the sands where we are now walking in such a manner that we shall not be able to keep our footing." —"I await your orders, my Lord, but—"—"But, you mean, we are still upon the king's soil."—"Exactly."

"Well, do you see yonder a kind of little island surrounded by a circular pool of water? The pool is increasing every minute, and the isle is gradually disappearing. This island, indeed, belongs to God; for it is situated between two seas, and is not shown on the king's maps. Do you observe it?"—"Yes; but we can hardly reach it now without getting our feet wet."—"Yes; but observe that it forms an eminence tolerably high, and that the tide rises on every side, leaving the top free. We shall be admirably placed upon that little theatre. What do you think of it?"—"I shall be perfectly happy wherever my sword may have the honour of crossing your Lordship's."

"Very well, then. I am distressed to be the cause of your wetting your feet, M. de Wardes; but it is most essential, I think, that you should be able to say to the king, 'Sire, I did not fight upon your Majesty's territory.' Perhaps the distinction is somewhat subtle; but since Port-Royal you abound in subtleties of expression. Do not let us complain of this, however, for it makes your wit very brilliant, and of a style peculiarly your own. If you do not object, we will hurry, M. de Wardes; for the sea, I perceive, is rising fast, and night is setting in."

"My reason for not walking faster, my Lord, was that I did not wish to precede your Grace. Are you still on dry land, my Lord Duke?"—"Yes, just at present. Look yonder! my servants are afraid that we shall be drowned, and have converted the boat into a cruiser. Do you see how curiously it dances upon the crests of the waves? But as it makes me feel sea-sick, would you permit me to turn my back towards them?"—"You will observe, my Lord, that in turning your back to them you will have the sun full in your face."—"Oh, its rays are very feeble at this hour, and it will soon have disappeared. Do not be uneasy at that!"—"As you please, my Lord. It was out of consideration for your Lordship that I made the remark."

"I am aware of that, M. de Wardes, and I appreciate your kindness. Shall we take off our doublets?"—"As you please, my Lord."—"It is more convenient."—"Then I am all ready."—"Do not hesitate to tell me, M. de Wardes, if you do not feel comfortable upon the wet sand, or if you think yourself a little too close to the French territory. We could fight in England, or else upon my yacht."—"We are exceedingly well placed here, my Lord; only I have the honour to remark that, as the sea is rising fast, we have hardly time—"

Buckingham made a sign of assent, took off his doublet, and

threw it on the sand. De Wardes did likewise. Both their bodies—white, like two phantoms, to those who were looking at them from the shore—were thrown strongly into relief by a reddish-violet shadow with which the sky became overspread. "Upon my word, Monsieur the Duke," said De Wardes, "we shall hardly have time to begin. Do you not perceive how our feet are sinking into the sand?"—"I have sunk up to the ankles," said Buckingham, "without reckoning that the water is still rising upon us."—"It has already reached me. As soon as you please, therefore, Monsieur the Duke," said De Wardes; and he drew his sword,—a movement imitated by the duke.

"M. de Wardes," then said Buckingham, "one final word, if you please. I am about to fight you because I do not like you, —because you have wounded me in ridiculing a certain passion which I have entertained, and one which I acknowledge that at this moment I still retain, and for which I would very willingly die. You are a wicked man, M. de Wardes, and I will do my utmost to take your life; for I feel assured that if you survive this engagement, you will in the future work great mischief to my friends. That is all I have to say to you, M. de Wardes;" and Buckingham saluted.—"And I, my Lord, have only this to reply to you: I have not disliked you hitherto; but now that you have divined my character I hate you, and will do all I can to kill you;" and De Wardes saluted Buckingham.

Their swords crossed at the same moment, like two flashes of lightning meeting in a dark night. The swords seemed to seek each other and feel their way to contact. Both were practised swordsmen, and the earlier passes were without any result. The night was fast closing in, and it was so dark that they attacked and defended themselves almost instinctively. Suddenly De Wardes felt his sword arrested; he had just touched Buckingham's shoulder. The duke's sword sank, as his arm was lowered. "Oh!" said he.

"You are touched, my Lord," said De Wardes, drawing back a step or two.—"Yes, Monsieur, but only slightly."—"Yet you quitted your guard."—"Only from the first effect of the cold steel, but I have recovered. Let us go on, if you please, Monsieur;" and disengaging his sword with a sinister clashing of the blade, the duke wounded De Wardes in the breast.

"Touched also," he said.—"No," said De Wardes, standing firm in his place.—"I beg your pardon; but seeing your shirt all red—" said Buckingham.—"Well," said De Wardes, furiously, "it is now your turn;" and with a terrible lunge he

pierced Buckingham's fore-arm, the sword passing between the two bones. Buckingham, feeling his right arm paralysed, stretched out his left arm, seized his sword, which was about falling from his nerveless grasp, and before De Wardes could resume his guard, thrust it through his breast. De Wardes tottered, his knees gave way beneath him, and leaving his sword still fixed in the duke's arm, he fell into the water, which was soon crimsoned with a more genuine stain than that which it had taken from the clouds. De Wardes was not dead; he felt the terrible danger with which he was menaced, for the sea was rising. The duke, too, perceived the danger. With an effort, and an exclamation of pain, he tore out the blade which had remained in his arm, and turning to De Wardes, said, "Are you dead, Monsieur?"

"No," replied De Wardes, in a voice choked by the blood which rushed from his lungs to his throat, "but very near it."—"Well, what is to be done? Let us see; can you walk?" said Buckingham, supporting him on his knee.—"Impossible," said De Wardes; then falling back again, he said, "Call to your people, or I shall be drowned."

"Halloa!" shouted Buckingham; "boat there! quick, quick!" The boat flew over the waves, but the sea rose faster than the boat could approach. Buckingham saw that De Wardes was on the point of being again covered by a wave; he passed his left arm, safe and unwounded, round De Wardes's body, and raised him up. The wave ascended to the duke's waist, but could not move him. He immediately began to walk towards the shore. He had hardly gone ten paces when a second wave, rushing onwards,—higher, more menacing, more furious, than the former,—struck him at the height of his chest, threw him over, and buried him beneath the water. At the reflux, however, the duke and De Wardes were discovered lying on the sand. De Wardes had fainted. At this moment four of the duke's sailors, who comprehended the danger, threw themselves into the sea, and in a moment were close beside him. Their terror was extreme when they observed that their master became covered with blood in proportion as the water with which it was impregnated flowed towards his knees and feet. They wished to carry him away.

"No, no!" exclaimed the duke; "take M. de Wardes on shore first."—"Death to the Frenchman!" cried the English, sullenly.

"Wretched knaves!" exclaimed the duke, drawing himself

up with a haughty gesture, which sprinkled them with blood, "obey directly! M. de Wardes on shore! M. de Wardes's safety to be looked to first, or I will have you all hanged!" The boat had by this time reached them; the secretary and the steward in their turn leaped into the sea, and approached De Wardes, who no longer showed any sign of life. "I commit this man to your care as you value your lives," said the duke. "Take M. de Wardes on shore!" They took him in their arms, and carried him to the dry sand, which the tide never reached. A few idlers and five or six fishermen had gathered on the shore, attracted by the strange spectacle of two men fighting with the water up to their knees. The fishermen, observing a group of men approaching carrying a wounded man, themselves entered the sea until the water was up to their waists. The English transferred the wounded man to them at the very moment the latter began to open his eyes again. The salt water and the fine sand had got into his wounds, and caused him unspeakable suffering.

The duke's secretary drew from his pocket a filled purse, and handed it to the one among those present who appeared of most importance, saying, "From my master, his grace the Duke of Buckingham, in order that every conceivable care may be taken of M. de Wardes." Then, followed by his men, he returned to the boat, which Buckingham had been enabled to reach with the greatest difficulty, after he had seen De Wardes out of danger. By this time it was high tide. The embroidered coats and silk sashes were lost; many hats, too, had been carried away by the waves. The flow of the tide had borne the duke's and De Wardes's clothes to the shore; and De Wardes was wrapped in the duke's doublet, under the belief that it was his own, and they carried him in their arms towards the town.

CHAPTER CIV

THREEFOLD LOVE

As soon as Buckingham had gone, De Guiche imagined that the field would be open to him without a rival. Monsieur, who no longer retained the slightest feeling of jealousy, and who besides permitted himself to be monopolised by the Chevalier de Lorraine, allowed as much liberty in his house as the most exacting person could desire. The king, on his side, who had conceived a taste for Madame's society, invented entertainment

upon entertainment in order to enliven her residence in Paris; so that not a day passed without a ball at the Palais-Royal or a reception in Monsieur's apartments. The king had directed that Fontainebleau should be prepared for the reception of the court, and every one was using his utmost interest to get invited.

Madame led a life of incessant occupation; neither her voice nor her pen was idle for a moment. The conversations with De Guiche were gradually assuming an interest which might be recognised as the prelude of a deep-seated attachment. When eyes look languishingly while the subject under discussion happens to be the colours of materials for dresses; when a whole hour is occupied in analysing the merits and the perfume of a sachet or a flower,—in this style of conversation there are words to which every one might listen, but there are gestures and sighs which every one is not allowed to perceive. After Madame had talked for some time with M. de Guiche, she conversed with the king, who paid her a visit regularly every day. They played, wrote verses, or selected mottoes and emblematical devices. That spring was not only the spring-time of Nature; it was the youth of an entire people, of which those at court were the head. The king was handsome, young, and of unequalled gallantry. All women were passionately loved by him, even the queen his wife. This great king was, however, more timid and more reserved than any other person in the kingdom,—to such a degree, indeed, that he had not confessed his sentiments even to himself. This timidity of bearing restrained him within the limits of ordinary politeness, and no woman could boast of having received preference beyond another. It might be foretold that the day when his real character would be displayed would be the dawn of a new sovereignty; but as yet he had not declared himself. M. de Guiche took advantage of this to constitute himself the sovereign prince of the whole court of love. It had been reported that he was on the best of terms with Mademoiselle de Montalais; that he had been assiduously attentive to Mademoiselle de Châtillon; but now he was not even barely civil to any of the court beauties. He had eyes and ears but for one person alone. In this manner, and as it were without design, he resumed his place with Monsieur, who had a great regard for him, and kept him as much as possible in his own apartments. Unsociable from natural disposition, he was too reserved before the arrival of Madame, but after her arrival he was not reserved enough.

This conduct, which every one had observed, had been

particularly remarked by the evil genius of the house, the Chevalier de Lorraine, for whom Monsieur exhibited the warmest attachment, because he was of a very cheerful disposition even in his most malicious remarks, and because he was never at a loss how to make the time pass away. The Chevalier de Lorraine, therefore, seeing that he was threatened with being supplanted by De Guiche, resorted to strong measures. He disappeared from the court, leaving Monsieur much embarrassed. The first day of his disappearance, Monsieur hardly inquired about him; for De Guiche was there, and except the time devoted to conversation with Madame, the count's days and nights were rigorously devoted to the prince. On the second day, however, Monsieur, finding no one near him, inquired where the chevalier was. He was told that no one knew.

De Guiche, after having spent the morning in selecting embroideries and fringes with Madame, went to console the prince. But after dinner, as there were tulips and amethysts to look at, De Guiche returned to Madame's boudoir. Monsieur was left quite to himself during the hour devoted to his toilet: he felt that he was the most miserable of men, and again inquired whether there was any news of the chevalier, in reply to which he was told that no one knew where Monsieur the Chevalier was to be found. Monsieur, hardly knowing in what direction to inflict his weariness, went to Madame's apartments dressed in his morning-gown and cap. He found a large assemblage of people there, laughing and whispering in every part of the room. At one end were a group of women around one of the courtiers, talking together amid smothered bursts of laughter; at the other end Manicamp and Malicorne were being pillaged by Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and two other laughing maids of honour. In a farther corner was Madame, seated upon some cushions, with De Guiche on his knees beside her, spreading out a handful of pearls and precious stones, while she, with her white and slender finger, pointed out such among them as pleased her the most. Again, in another corner of the room, a guitar-player was humming some of the Spanish seguedillas, to which Madame had taken the greatest fancy ever since she had heard them sung by the young queen with tender melancholy. But the songs which the Spaniard had sung with tears in her eyes, the young Englishwoman was humming with a smile which displayed her pearly teeth. The boudoir presented, in fact, a scene of hilarious enjoyment.

As he entered, Monsieur was struck at beholding so many persons enjoying themselves without him. He was so jealous at the sight that he could not resist saying, like a child, "What! you are amusing yourselves here, while I weary myself all alone!" The sound of his voice was like a clap of thunder which interrupts the warbling of birds in the leafy branches; a dead silence ensued. De Guiche was on his feet in a moment. Malicorne tried to hide himself behind Montalais's dress. Manicamp stood bolt upright, and assumed a very ceremonious demeanour. The guitar-player thrust the guitar under a table, covering it with a piece of carpet to conceal it from the prince's observation. Madame alone did not move, and smiling at her husband, replied to him, "Is not this the hour which you usually devote to your toilet?"

"An hour which others select, it seems, for amusing themselves," grumbled the prince. This untoward remark was the signal for a general rout. The women fled like a flock of frightened birds; the guitar-player vanished like a shadow. Malicorne, still protected by Montalais, who widened out her dress, glided behind the hanging tapestry. As for Manicamp, he went to the assistance of De Guiche, who naturally remained near Madame; and both of them, with the princess herself, courageously sustained the attack. The count was too happy to bear malice against the husband; but Monsieur bore a grudge against his wife. He had been wanting a motive for a quarrel; he sought it. And the hurried departure of the crowd, which had been so merry before he arrived, and was so disturbed by his entrance, furnished him with a pretext.

"Why do they take to flight at the sight of me?" he inquired in a rough tone. To this remark Madame replied coldly, "Whenever the master of the house makes his appearance, the household keep aloof out of respect."

As Madame said this, she made so funny and so pretty a grimace that De Guiche and Manicamp could not control themselves; they burst into a peal of laughter. Madame followed their example; and even Monsieur himself could not resist it, and was obliged to sit down, since in laughing he had sacrificed his dignity. However, he very soon left off; but his anger had increased. He was still more furious at having allowed himself to laugh than at having seen others laugh. He stared at Manicamp, not venturing to show his anger towards De Guiche. But at a sign which displayed too great an amount of annoyance, Manicamp and De Guiche left the room; so that Madame,

deserted, began sadly to pick up her pearls, no longer laughing, and speaking still less. "I am very happy," said the duke, "to find myself treated as a stranger here, Madame;" and he left the room in a passion.

On his way out he met Montalais, who was in attendance in the anteroom. "It is very agreeable to pay you a visit here," said he,—"but outside the door." Montalais made a very low obeisance. "I do not quite understand," said she, "what your royal Highness does me the honour to say."—"I say, Mademoiselle, that when you are all laughing together in Madame's apartment, he is an unwelcome visitor who does not remain outside."

"Your royal Highness certainly does not think and speak so of yourself."—"On the contrary, Mademoiselle, it is on my own account that I do speak and think. I have no reason, certainly, to flatter myself on the reception I meet with here. How is it that on the very day when there is music and a little society in Madame's apartments,—in my own apartments, indeed, for they are mine,—on the very day when I wish to amuse myself a little in my turn, every one runs away? Are they afraid to see me, that they all took to flight as soon as I appeared? Is there anything wrong, then, going on in my absence?"

"But," replied Montalais, "nothing has been done to-day, Monseigneur, which is not done every day."—"What! do they laugh like that every day?"—"Why, yes, Monseigneur."—"Every day the same groups of people and the same strumming as just now?"—"The guitar, Monseigneur, was introduced to-day; but when we have no guitars, we have violins and flutes. Women get wearied without music."

"*Peste!* and the men!"—"What men, Monseigneur!"—"M. de Guiche, M. de Manicamp, and the others."—"They all belong to Monseigneur's household."—"Yes, yes, you're right, Mademoiselle," said the prince; and he returned to his own apartments, full of thought. He threw himself into the deepest of his arm-chairs, without looking at himself in the glass. "Where can the chevalier be?" said he.

One of the prince's attendants who happened to be near him, overheard his remark, and replied, "No one knows, Monseigneur."—"Still the same answer! The first one who answers me again, 'I do not know,' I will discharge." Every one at this remark hurried out of the apartments, in the same manner as the others had fled from Madame's apartments. The prince then flew into the wildest rage. He kicked over a chiffonier,

which tumbled upon the floor, broken into pieces. He next went into the galleries, and with the greatest coolness threw down, one after another, an enamelled vase, a porphyry ewer, and a bronze candelabra. All this made a frightful noise, and every one appeared in the various doorways.

"What is your Highness's pleasure?" hazarded the captain of the guards, timidly.

"I am treating myself to some music," replied Monseigneur, gnashing his teeth. The captain of the guards desired his royal highness's physician to be sent for. But before he came, Malicorne arrived, saying to the prince, "Monseigneur, M. le Chevalier de Lorraine is here." The duke looked at Malicorne, and smiled graciously at him, just as the chevalier entered.

CHAPTER CV

M. DE LORRAINE'S JEALOUSY

THE Duc d'Orléans uttered a cry of delight on perceiving the Chevalier de Lorraine. "This is fortunate, indeed!" he said. "By what happy chance do I see you? Had you indeed disappeared, as every one assured me?"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"Some caprice?"—"I to venture upon caprices with your Highness! The respect—"

"Put respect out of the way, for you fail in it every day. I absolve you. But why did you go away?"—"Because I felt that I was of no use to you."—"Explain yourself."—"Your Highness has people about you who are far more amusing than I can ever be. I felt that I was not strong enough to enter into a contest with them, and I therefore withdrew."—"This extreme diffidence shows a want of common sense. Who are those with whom you cannot contend,—Guiche?"—"I name no one."—"This is absurd! Does Guiche annoy you?"—"I do not say that, Monseigneur. Do not force me to speak, however; you know very well that De Guiche is one of our best friends."

"Who is it, then?"—"Excuse me, Monseigneur; let us say no more about it, I beg of you." The chevalier knew perfectly well that curiosity is excited in the same way as thirst,—by removing that which quenches it; or, in other words, by delaying the explanation.

"No; I wish to know why you went away."—"In that case, Monseigneur, I will tell you; but do not be angry. I perceived

that my presence was disagreeable."—"To whom?"—"To Madame."—"What do you mean?" said the duke, in astonishment.

"It is simple enough: Madame is very probably jealous of the regard you are good enough to testify for me."—"Has she shown it to you?"—"Monseigneur, Madame never addresses a syllable to me,—particularly since a certain time."—"Since what time?"—"Since the time when, M. de Guiche having made himself more agreeable to her than I could, she receives him at all hours." The duke coloured. "At all hours, Chevalier? What do you mean by that?" said he, sternly.

"You see, Monseigneur, that I have displeased you; I was quite sure I should."—"I am not displeased; but you say things a little strong. In what respect does Madame prefer De Guiche to you?"—"I shall say no more," said the chevalier, with a ceremonious bow.

"On the contrary, I require you to speak. If you withdraw on that account, you must indeed be very jealous."—"One cannot help being jealous, Monseigneur, when one loves. Is not your royal Highness jealous of Madame? Would not your royal Highness, if you saw some one always near Madame and always treated with great favour, take umbrage at it? One's friends are as one's lovers. Your royal Highness has sometimes conferred upon me the distinguished honour of calling me your friend."—"Yes, yes; but here again is an equivocal expression. Chevalier, you are unfortunate in your remarks."—"What expression, Monseigneur?"—"You said, 'treated with great favour.' What do you mean by 'favour'?"

"Nothing can be more simple, Monseigneur," said the chevalier, with great frankness. "For instance, when a husband remarks that his wife summons, from preference, such and such a man near her; when this man is always to be found by her side or in attendance at the door of her carriage; when that man is always found within reach of her hand; when persons get together beyond the reach of general conversation; when the bouquet of the one is always of the same colour as the ribbons of the other; when concerts and supper-parties are held in the private apartments; when a dead silence takes place as soon as the husband makes his appearance in his wife's rooms; and when the husband suddenly finds that he has as a companion the most devoted and the kindest of men, who a week before was with him as little as possible,—why, then—"—"Well, finish!"—"Why, then, I say, Monseigneur, one possibly may

get jealous. But all these details hardly apply; for our conversation had nothing to do with them."

The duke was evidently much agitated, and seemed contending with himself. "You have not told me," he at last remarked, "why you absented yourself. A little while ago you said it was from fear of intruding; you added, even, that you had observed a disposition on Madame's part to encourage De Guiche."—"Ah, Monseigneur, I did not say that!"—"You did, indeed."—"Well, if I did say so, I noticed nothing but what was very inoffensive."

"At all events, you remarked something."—"You embarrass me, Monseigneur."—"What does that matter? Answer me! If you speak the truth, why should you feel embarrassed?"—"I always speak the truth, Monseigneur; but I also always hesitate when it is a question of repeating what others say."—"Ah! you are repeating? It appears that it is talked about, then?"—"I acknowledge that others have spoken to me on the subject."—"Who?"

The chevalier assumed almost an angry air as he replied: "Monseigneur, you are subjecting me to an examination; you treat me like a criminal at the bar. The rumours which touch a gentleman's ears in passing do not tarry there. Your Highness wishes me to magnify the rumour until it attains the importance of an event."—"However," said the duke, in great displeasure, "the fact remains that you yourself withdrew on account of this report."

"To speak the truth, others have talked to me of the attentions of M. de Guiche to Madame,—nothing more; perfectly harmless, I repeat, and, more than that, permissible. But do not be unjust, Monseigneur, and do not attach an undue importance to it. It does not concern you."—"Gossip about M. de Guiche's attentions to Madame does not concern me?"—"No, Monseigneur; and what I say to you I would say to De Guiche himself, so little do I think of the court he pays Madame. Nay, I would say it even to Madame herself. Only, you understand what I am afraid of; I am afraid of being thought jealous of the favour shown, when I am only jealous so far as friendship is concerned. I know your disposition; I know that when you bestow your affections you become exclusively attached. You love Madame,—and who, indeed, would not love her? Follow me attentively as I proceed. Madame has noticed among your friends the handsomest and most fascinating of them all; she will begin to influence you on his behalf in such

a way that you will neglect the others. Your indifference would kill me; it is already bad enough to have to endure that of Madame. I have therefore made up my mind, Monseigneur, to give way to the favourite whose happiness I envy, even while I acknowledge my sincere friendship and sincere admiration for him. Now, do you see anything to object to in this reasoning? Is it not that of a man of honour? Is my conduct that of a sincere friend? Answer me, at least, after having so closely questioned me."

The duke had seated himself, with his head buried in his hands and his hair dishevelled. After a silence long enough to enable the chevalier to judge of the effect of his oratorical display, Monseigneur rose, saying, "Come, be candid."—"As I always am."—"Very well. You know that we have already observed something respecting that mad fellow, Buckingham."—"Oh, do not say anything against Madame, Monseigneur, or I shall take my leave. What! do you go so far as to be suspicious of Madame?"—"No, no, Chevalier, I do not suspect Madame; but, in fact, I observe—I compare—"—"Buckingham was a madman, Monseigneur."—"A madman about whom, however, you opened my eyes thoroughly."—"No, no," said the chevalier, quickly; "it was not I who opened your eyes, it was De Guiche. Do not confound us, I beg!" and he began to laugh so harshly that it sounded like the hiss of an adder.

"Yes, yes; I remember. You said a few words, but De Guiche showed the most jealousy."—"I should think so," continued the chevalier, in the same tone. "He was fighting for home and altar."

"What did you say?" said the duke, haughtily, thoroughly roused by this insidious jest.—"Am I not right, for is not M. de Guiche the first gentleman of your household?"

"Well," replied the duke, somewhat calmed, "had this passion of Buckingham been remarked?"—"Certainly."—"Very well. Do people say that M. de Guiche's is remarked as much?"—"Pardon me, Monseigneur; you are again mistaken. No one says that M. de Guiche entertains anything of the sort,"—"Very good."

"You see, Monseigneur, that it would have been better, a hundred times better, to have left me in my retirement, than to have allowed yourself to conjure up, by the aid of any scruples which I may have had, suspicions which Madame will regard as crimes; and she will be right too."—"What would you do?"—"Act reasonably."—"In what way?"—"I should not pay the

slightest attention to the society of these new Epicureans; and in that way the rumours will cease."—"I will see; I will think it over."—"Oh, you have time enough! The danger is not great; and then, besides, it is not a question either of danger or of passion. It all arose from a fear of seeing your friendship for me decrease. From the very moment when you restore it to me with so kind an assurance, I have no longer any other idea in my head." The duke shook his head, as if he meant to say, "If you have no more ideas, I have, though."

The dinner-hour having arrived, the prince sent to inform Madame of it, who returned a message to the effect that she could not be present at the feast, but would dine in her own apartment. "That is not my fault," said the duke. "This morning, having taken them by surprise in the midst of a musical assembly, I got jealous; and so they are in the sulks with me."

"We will dine alone," said the chevalier, with a sigh; "I regret that De Guiche is not here."—"Oh, De Guiche will not remain long in the sulks; he is a very good-natured fellow."

"Monseigneur," said the chevalier, suddenly, "an excellent idea has struck me in our conversation just now. I may have exasperated your Highness, and caused you some dissatisfaction. It is but fitting that I should be the mediator. I will go and look for the count, and bring him back with me."—"Ah, Chevalier, you are a good soul!"—"You say that as if you were surprised."—"Well, you are not so tender-hearted every day."—"That may be; but confess that I know how to repair a wrong I may have done."—"I confess that."—"Will your Highness do me the favour to wait here a few minutes?"—"Willingly; be off, and I will try on my Fontainebleau costume."

The chevalier left the room, and called his attendants with the greatest care, as if he were giving them various orders. All went off in different directions, but he retained his *valet de chambre*. "Ascertain," said he, "and immediately too, whether M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments. How can it be ascertained?"—"Very easily, Monsieur the Chevalier. I will ask Malicorne, who will learn it from Mademoiselle de Montalais. I may as well tell you, however, that the inquiry will be useless; for all M. de Guiche's attendants have gone, and he must have left with them."—"Try to find out, nevertheless."

Ten minutes had hardly passed when the valet returned. He beckoned his master mysteriously towards the servants'

staircase, and showed him into a small room with a window looking out upon the garden. "What is the matter?" said the chevalier; "why so many precautions?"—"Look, Monsieur!" said the valet, "look yonder, under the walnut-tree!"

"Ah! *Mon Dieu!*" said the chevalier, "I see Manicamp there. What is he waiting for?"—"You will see if you wait patiently. There, do you see now?"—"I see one, two, four musicians with their instruments, and behind them, urging them on, De Guiche himself. What is he doing there, though?"—"He is waiting until the little door of the staircase belonging to the ladies of honour is opened; by that staircase he will ascend to Madame's apartments, where some new pieces of music are going to be performed during dinner."

"This is admirable that you tell me."—"Is it not, Monsieur?"—"Was it M. Malicorne who told you this?"—"Yes, Monsieur."—"He likes you, then?"—"No, Monsieur; it is Monsieur whom he likes."—"Why?"—"Because he wishes to belong to his household."

"*Mordieu!* so he shall. How much has he given you for that?"—"The secret which I now dispose of to you, Monsieur."—"And which I buy for a hundred pistoles. Take them."—"Thank you, Monsieur. Look! the little door opens; a woman admits the musicians."—"It is Montalais."—"Hush, Monsieur! Do not call out her name; whoever says Montalais, says Malicorne. If you quarrel with the one, you will be on bad terms with the other."—"Very well; I have seen nothing."—"And I," said the valet, pocketing the purse, "have received nothing."

The chevalier, being now certain that De Guiche had entered, returned to Monsieur, whom he found splendidly dressed and radiant with joy as well as with beauty. "I am told," he exclaimed, "that the king has taken the sun as his device; really, Monseigneur, it is you whom this device would better suit."

"Where is De Guiche?"—"He cannot be found. He has fled, has evaporated entirely. Your scolding of this morning has scared him away. He could not be found in his apartments."—"Bah! the hare-brained fellow is capable of setting off post-haste to his own estates. Poor fellow! we will recall him. Come, let us dine now."

"Monseigneur, to-day is a day of ideas; I have another."—"What is it?"—"Monseigneur, Madame is angry with you, and she has reason to be so. You owe her her revenge; go and dine with her."—"Oh, that would be acting like a weak husband!"

"No, like a good husband. The princess is no doubt wearied enough; she will be weeping in her plate, and her eyes will get quite red. A husband who is the cause of his wife's eyes getting red is an odious creature. Come, Monseigneur, come!"—"I cannot, for I have directed dinner to be served here."—"Yet see, Monseigneur, how dull we shall be! I shall have a heavy heart because I know that Madame will be alone; you, hard and savage as you wish to appear, will be sighing all the while. Take me with you to Madame's dinner, and that will be a delightful surprise. I am sure we shall be very merry. You were wrong this morning."—"Well, perhaps I was."—"There is no perhaps at all, for it is a fact."

"Chevalier, Chevalier, your advice is not good."—"Nay, my advice is good; all the advantages are on your own side. Your violet-coloured suit embroidered with gold becomes you admirably. Madame will be still more overcome by the man than by this handsome conduct. Come, Monseigneur!"—"You decide me; let us go."

The duke left his room, accompanied by the chevalier, and went towards Madame's apartments. The chevalier hastily whispered to his valet, "Be sure that there are some people before the little door, so that no one can escape in that direction. Run, run!" and he followed the duke to the antechambers of Madame's suite of apartments; and when the ushers were about to announce them, the chevalier said, laughing, "Do not stir; his highness wishes to give a surprise."

CHAPTER CVI

MONSIEUR IS JEALOUS OF DE GUICHE

MONSIEUR entered the room abruptly, as those persons enter who mean well and think they confer pleasure, or as those do who hope to surprise some secret,—the melancholy boon of jealous people. Madame, intoxicated by the first bars of the music, was dancing in the most unrestrained manner, leaving unfinished the dinner which she had begun. Her partner was M. de Guiche, who with his arms raised and his eyes half closed was kneeling on one knee, like the Spanish dancers, with eyes full of passion and with caressing gestures. The princess was dancing round him with a responsive smile and the same alluring seductiveness. Montalais stood by admiringly; La Vallière, seated in a corner of the room, looked on thoughtfully.

It is impossible to describe the effect which the presence of Monsieur produced upon this happy company, and it would be just as impossible to describe the effect which the sight of their happiness produced upon Philip. The Comte de Guiche had no power to move. Madame remained in the middle of one of the figures, in a suspended attitude, unable to utter a word. The Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning back against the door-frame, smiled like a man in the very height of the frankest admiration. The pallor of the prince and the convulsive trembling of his hands and limbs were the first symptoms that struck those present. A dead silence succeeded the sound of the dance. The Chevalier de Lorraine took advantage of this interval to salute Madame and De Guiche respectively, affecting to include them both in his reverences, as though they were the master and mistress of the house. Monsieur then approached them, saying in a hoarse tone, "I am delighted. I came here expecting to find you ill and low-spirited, and I see you occupied in new amusements. Really, it is most fortunate. My house is the merriest in the world." Then, turning towards De Guiche, "Count," he said, "I did not know you were so good a dancer." And again addressing his wife, he said, with a bitterness of expression which disguised his wrath, "Show a little more consideration for me, Madame! Whenever you intend to amuse yourselves here, invite me; I am a prince very much neglected."

De Guiche had now recovered his self-possession; and with the spirited boldness which was natural to him and which so well became him, he said, "Your Highness knows very well that my very life is at your service, and whenever there is a question of its being needed, I am ready; but to-day, as it is only a question of dancing to music, I dance."—"And you are perfectly right," said the prince, coldly. "But, Madame," he continued, "you do not observe that your ladies deprive me of my friends? M. de Guiche does not belong to you, Madame, but to me. If you wish to dine without me, you have your ladies; when I dine without you, I have my gentlemen. Do not rob me of everything."

Madame felt the reproach and the lesson, and the colour rushed to her face. "Monsieur," she replied, "I was not aware, when I came to the Court of France, that princesses of my rank were to be regarded as the women in Turkey are,—I was not aware that we were not allowed to see men; but since such is your desire, I will conform to it. Pray do not hesitate, if you should wish it, to have my windows barred."

This repartee, which made Montalais and De Guiche smile, rekindled the prince's anger, no inconsiderable portion of which had already evaporated in words. "Very well," he said, in a concentrated tone of voice, "this is the way in which I am respected in my own house."

"Monseigneur, Monseigneur!" murmured the chevalier in Monsieur's ear, in such a manner that every one could observe that he was endeavouring to calm him.—"Come!" replied the duke, as his only answer, hurrying him away, and turning round with so hasty a movement that he almost ran against Madame.

The chevalier followed his master to his own apartment, where the prince was no sooner seated than he gave free rein to his fury. The chevalier raised his eyes to the ceiling, clasped his hands together, and said not a word.

"Give me your opinion!" exclaimed the prince.—"Upon what, Monseigneur?"—"Upon all that is taking place here."—"Oh, Monseigneur, it is a very serious matter!"—"It is abominable! I cannot live in this manner."—"How unhappy all this is!" said the chevalier. "We hoped to enjoy tranquillity after that madman Buckingham had left."

"And this is worse."—"I do not say that, Monseigneur."—"Yes; but I say it, for Buckingham would never have ventured upon a fourth part of what we have just now seen."—"What do you mean?"—"To conceal one's self for the purpose of dancing, and to feign indisposition in order to dine *tête-à-tête*."—"Oh, no, no, Monseigneur!"—"Yes, yes," exclaimed the prince, exciting himself like a self-willed child; "but I will not endure it any longer, I must know what is going on."—"Monseigneur, an exposure—"—"By Heaven, Monsieur, am I to restrain myself when people show so little consideration for me? Wait for me here, Chevalier, wait for me here!" The prince disappeared in the next room, and inquired of the gentleman in attendance if the queen-mother had returned from chapel.

Anne of Austria felt that her happiness was now complete. Peace restored to her family, and the nation delighted with the presence of a young monarch who promised a grand administration; the revenues of the State increased; external peace assured,—everything seemed to presage a tranquil future for her. Her thoughts recurred now and then to that poor young man whom she had received as a mother and had driven away as a hard-hearted stepmother, and she sighed as she thought of him. Suddenly the Duc d'Orléans entered her room. "Dear mother," he exclaimed, closing the doors hurriedly, "things cannot go on

as they now are." Anne of Austria raised her beautiful eyes towards him, and with an unmoved gentleness of manner said, "To what things do you allude?"

"I wish to speak of Madame."—"Your wife?"—"Yes, mother."—"I suppose that silly fellow Buckingham has been writing a farewell letter to her."—"Oh, yes, Madame; of course, it is a question of Buckingham!"—"Of whom else could it be, then?—for that poor fellow was, wrongly enough, the object of your jealousy, and I thought—"

"My wife, Madame, has already replaced the Duke of Buckingham."—"Philip, what are you saying? You are speaking very heedlessly."—"No, no. Madame has done so well that I am still jealous."—"Of whom, in Heaven's name?"—"Is it possible that you have not remarked it? Have you not noticed that M. de Guiche is always in her apartments, always with her?"

The queen clapped her hands together and began to laugh. "Philip," she said, "your jealousy is not merely a defect, it is a positive disease."—"Whether a defect or a disease, Madame, I suffer from it."—"And do you imagine that a complaint which exists only in your own imagination can be cured? You wish it to be said that you are right in being jealous, when there is no ground whatever for your jealousy."—"Of course you will begin to say for this one what you said for the other."—"Because, my son," said the queen, dryly, "what you did for the other, you are beginning again for this one."

The prince bowed, slightly annoyed. "If I give you facts," he said, "will you believe me?"—"If it regarded anything else but jealousy, my son, I would believe you without your alleging facts; but as jealousy is in the case, I promise you nothing."—"Then this is just the same as if your Majesty were to order me to hold my tongue, and sent me away unheard."—"Far from it; as you are my son, I owe you a mother's indulgence."—"Oh, say what you think,—you owe me as much indulgence as a madman deserves."

"Do not exaggerate, Philip, and take care how you represent your wife to me as a woman of a depraved mind—"—"But facts, mother, facts!"—"Well, I am listening."—"This morning, at ten o'clock, they were playing music in Madame's apartments."—"No harm in that, surely."—"M. de Guiche was talking with her alone— Ah! I forgot to tell you that for a week he has haunted her like a shadow."—"If they were doing any harm, they would hide themselves."—"Very good," exclaimed the

duke, "I expected you to say that. Pray, do not forget what you have just said. This morning, I say, I took them by surprise, and showed my dissatisfaction in a very marked manner."

"Rely upon it, that is quite sufficient; it was, perhaps, even a little too much. These young women easily take offence. To reproach them for an error they have not committed is sometimes almost the same as telling them they may do it."—"Very good, very good; but wait a minute. Do not forget what you have just this minute said, Madame, that this morning's lesson ought to have been sufficient, and that if they had been doing what was wrong, they would have concealed themselves."—"Yes, I said so."—"Well, just now, repenting of my hastiness of this morning and supposing that Guiche was sulking in his own apartments, I went to pay Madame a visit. Can you guess what or whom I found there? Another band of musicians, dancing, and Guiche himself,—he was concealed there."

Anne of Austria frowned. "It was imprudent," she said. "What did Madame say?"—"Nothing."—"And Guiche?"—"As much—oh, no! he stammered forth some impertinences."—"Well, what is your opinion, Philip?"—"That I have been made a fool of; that Buckingham was only a pretext, and that the true culprit is Guiche."

Anne shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "what else?"—"I wish De Guiche to be dismissed from my household, as Buckingham was; and I shall ask the king, unless—"—"Unless what?"—"Unless you, Madame, who are so clever and so kind, will execute the commission yourself."—"I shall not do it."

"What, Madame!"—"Listen, Philip! I am not disposed to pay people ill compliments every day; I have some influence over young people, but I cannot take advantage of it without risk of losing it altogether. Besides, there is nothing to prove that M. de Guiche is guilty."—"He has displeased me."—"That is your own affair."—"Very well, I know what I shall do," said the prince, impetuously.

Anne looked at him with some uneasiness. "What will you do?" she said.—"I will have him drowned in my reservoir the next time I find him in my apartments again." Having launched this terrible threat, the prince expected that his mother would be frightened out of her senses; but the queen was unmoved by it. "Do so," she said.

Philip was as weak as a woman, and began to cry out, "Every

one betrays me, no one cares for me; my mother even joins my enemies."—"Your mother sees further in the matter than you do, and does not care about advising you, since you do not listen to her."—"I will go to the king."—"I was about to propose that to you. I am now expecting his Majesty here,—it is the hour he usually pays me a visit; explain the matter to him yourself."

She had hardly finished when Philip heard the door of the anteroom open with some noise. He began to feel nervous. At the sound of the king's footsteps, which could be heard upon the carpet, the duke hurriedly made his escape by a small door, leaving the ground to the queen. Anne of Austria began to laugh, and was laughing still when the king entered. He came very affectionately to inquire after the even now uncertain health of the queen-mother, and to announce to her that the preparations for the journey to Fontainebleau were completed. Seeing her laugh, his uneasiness on her account diminished, and he addressed her in a laughing tone himself. Anne of Austria took him by the hand, and in a voice full of playfulness, said, "Do you know that I am proud of being a Spanish woman?"

"Why, Madame?"—"Because Spanish women are worth more than English women at least."—"Explain yourself."

"Since your marriage you have not, I believe, had a single reproach to make against the queen."—"Certainly not."—"And you, too, have been married some time. Your brother, on the contrary, has been married only a fortnight."—"Well?"—"He is now finding fault with Madame a second time."

"What! Buckingham still?"—"No, another."—"Who?"—"De Guiche."—"Really, Madame is a coquette, then?"—"I fear so."—"My poor brother," said the king, laughing.

"You do not mind coquetry, it seems?"—"In Madame certainly I do; but Madame is not a coquette at heart."—"That may be, but your brother is excessively angry about it."—"What does he want?"—"He wishes to drown De Guiche."—"That is a violent measure to resort to."—"Do not laugh! he is extremely irritated. Think of what can be done."—"To save De Guiche?—certainly."

"Oh, if your brother heard you, he would conspire against you as your uncle Monsieur did against the king your father."—"No; Philip has too much affection for me for that, and I on my side have too great a regard for him. We shall live together on very good terms. But what is the substance of his request?"—"That you will prevent Madame from being a coquette, and

De Guiche from being agreeable."—"Is that all? My brother has an exalted idea of the royal power. To reform a woman, to say nothing of reforming a man!"

"How will you set about it?"—"With a word to De Guiche, who is a clever fellow, I will undertake to convince him."—"But Madame?"—"That is more difficult; a word will not be enough. I will compose a homily and preach it to her."—"There is no time to be lost."—"Oh, I will use the utmost diligence. There is a repetition of the ballet after dinner."—"You will read her a lecture while you are dancing?"—"Yes, Madame."—"You promise to convert her?"—"I will root out the heresy altogether, either by convincing her or by extreme measures."

"That is all right, then. Do not mix me up in the affair. Madame would never forgive me in her life; and as a mother-in-law, I ought to try to live on good terms with my daughter-in-law."—"The king, Madame, will take all upon himself. But let me reflect."—"What about?"

"It would be better, perhaps, if I were to go and see Madame in her own apartment."—"Would not that seem a somewhat serious step to take?"—"Yes; but seriousness is not unbecoming in preachers, and the music of the ballet would drown one half of my arguments. Besides, the object is to prevent any violent measures on my brother's part, so that a little precipitation may be advisable. Is Madame in her own apartment?"—"I believe so."

"Of what is my statement of grievances to consist?"—"In a few words, of the following: music uninterruptedly; De Guiche's assiduity; suspicions of treasonable plots and practices."—"And the proofs?"—"There are none."—"Very well; I shall go at once to see Madame." The king turned to look in the mirrors at his costume, which was very rich, and at his face, which was as radiant and sparkling as diamonds. "I suppose my brother is kept a little at a distance," he said.

"Oh, fire and water cannot possibly be more uncongenial!"—"That will do. Permit me, Madame, to kiss your hands,—the most beautiful hands in France."—"May you be successful, Sire,—may you be the family peacemaker!"—"I do not employ an ambassador," replied Louis,—"which is as much as to say that I shall succeed." He went out laughing, and carefully brushed his dress as he went along.

CHAPTER CVII

THE MEDIATOR

When the king made his appearance in Madame's apartment, the courtiers, whom the news of a conjugal scene had dispersed in the various rooms, began to entertain the most serious apprehensions. A storm, too, was brewing in that direction, the elements of which the Chevalier de Lorraine, in the midst of the different groups, was analysing with delight, magnifying the weaker, and acting, according to his own wicked designs, in such a manner with regard to the stronger as to produce the most disastrous consequences possible. As Anne of Austria had said, the presence of the king gave a serious character to the event. Indeed, in the year 1662 the dissatisfaction of Monsieur with Madame, and the king's intervention in the private affairs of Monsieur, were matters of no inconsiderable moment.

Therefore the boldest, even, of the associates of the Comte de Guiche had been seen from the first moment to hold aloof from him with a sort of fright; and the count himself, infected by the general panic, retired to his own apartments alone. The king entered Madame's private apartment, acknowledging and returning the salutations, as he was always in the habit of doing. The ladies of honour were ranged in a line on his passage along the gallery. Although his Majesty was very much preoccupied, he gave the glance of a master at the two rows of young and beautiful girls, who modestly cast down their eyes, blushing as they felt the king's gaze upon them. One only of the number, whose long hair fell in silken ringlets upon the most beautiful skin imaginable,—one only was pale, and could hardly sustain herself, notwithstanding the hints which her companion gave her with her elbow. It was La Vallière, whom Montalais supported in that manner by whispering some of that courage to her with which she herself was so abundantly provided. The king could not resist turning round to look at them again. Their faces, which had already been raised, were again lowered; but the only fair head among them remained motionless, as if all her remaining strength and intelligence had abandoned her.

When he entered Madame's room, Louis found his sister-in-law reclining upon the cushions of her boudoir. She rose and made a profound reverence, murmuring some words of thanks

for the honour she was receiving. She then resumed her seat, overcome by a sudden weakness,—which was no doubt assumed, for a delightful colour animated her cheeks, while her eyes, still red from a few tears she had recently shed, never had more fire in them. When the king was seated, and as soon as he had remarked, with that accuracy of observation which characterised him, the disorder of the room, and the no less great disorder of Madame's countenance, he assumed a playful manner, saying, "My dear sister, at what hour to-day do you wish the repetition of the ballet to take place?" Madame, shaking her charming head, slowly and languishingly said: "Ah! Sire, will you graciously excuse my appearance at the repetition? I was about to send to inform your Majesty that I could not attend to-day."

"Indeed!" said the king, in apparent surprise; "are you not well, sister?"—"No, Sire."—"I will summon your medical attendants, then."—"No, for they can do nothing for my indisposition."—"You alarm me."

"Sire, I wish to ask your Majesty's permission to return to England." The king started. "Return to England!" he said; "do you really say what you mean, Madame?"—"I say it reluctantly, Sire," replied the granddaughter of Henry IV. firmly, her beautiful black eyes flashing. "I regret to have to confide such matters to your Majesty; but I feel myself too unhappy at your Majesty's court, and I wish to return to my own family."—"Madame, Madame!" exclaimed the king, approaching her.

"Listen to me, Sire!" continued the young woman, acquiring by degrees that ascendency over her interrogator which her beauty and her energetic nature conferred. "I am accustomed to suffering; young as I am, I have already suffered humiliation and have endured disdain. Oh, do not contradict me, Sire!" she said, with a smile. The king coloured. "Then," she continued, "I have come to believe that God had called me into existence with that object,—me, the daughter of a powerful monarch; but since he could strike at the life of my father, he might well strike at pride in me. I have suffered greatly; I have been the cause, too, of my mother's suffering much; but I have sworn that if Providence should ever place me in a position of independence, even were it that of a workwoman of the lower classes who gains her bread by her labour, I would never suffer humiliation again. That day has now arrived: I have been restored to the fortune due to my rank and to my

birth; I have ascended again the steps of a throne; and I thought that in allying myself with a French prince, I should find in him a relative, a friend, an equal; but I perceive that I have found only a master, and I rebel, Sire. My mother shall know nothing of it; you whom I respect, and whom I—love—" The king started; never had any voice so gratified his ear. "You, Sire, I say,—who know all, since you have come here,—you will, perhaps, understand me. If you had not come, I should have gone to you. I wish for permission to depart without restraint. I leave it to your delicacy of feeling—to you, a man *par excellence*—to exculpate and to protect me."

"My dear sister," murmured the king, overpowered by this bold attack, "have you well reflected upon the enormous difficulty of the project you have conceived?"—"Sire, I do not reflect, I feel. Attacked, I instinctively repel the attack; that is all."—"Come, tell me, what have they done to you?" said the king.

The princess, it will have been seen, by this peculiarly feminine manœuvre had escaped every reproach, and advanced on her side a far more serious one; from an accused, she became the accuser. It is an infallible sign of guilt; but from this palpable fault all women, even the least clever of the sex, invariably know how to derive some means of attaining success. The king had forgotten that he had paid her a visit in order to say to her, "What have you done to my brother?" and that he was reduced to saying to her, "What have they done to you?"

"What have they done to me?" replied Madame; "oh, one must be a woman to understand it, Sire!—they have made me weep;" and with a finger whose slenderness and pearly whiteness were unequalled, she pointed to her brilliant eyes swimming in tears, and again began to weep.—"I implore you, my dear sister," said the king, advancing to take her warm and throbbing hand, which she surrendered to him.

"In the first place, Sire, I was deprived of the presence of my brother's friend. The Duke of Buckingham was to me an agreeable, cheerful visitor, my own countryman, who knew my habits,—I will say almost a companion, so accustomed had we been to pass our days together, with our other friends, upon the beautiful piece of water at St. James's."—"But, my sister, Villiers was in love with you."—"A pretext! What does it matter," she said seriously, "whether the Duke of Buckingham was in love with me or not? Is a man in love so very dangerous for me? Ah, Sire, it is not sufficient for a man to love a woman;"

and she smiled so tenderly and with so much archness that the king felt his heart beat and throb within his breast.

"At all events, if my brother were jealous?" interrupted the king.—"Very well, I admit that is a reason; and the Duke of Buckingham was sent away accordingly."—"No, not sent away."—"Driven away, expelled, dismissed, then, if you prefer it, Sire. One of the first gentlemen of Europe was obliged to leave the court of the King of France, of Louis XIV., like a beggar, on account of a glance or a bouquet. It was little worthy of this most gallant court. But forgive me, Sire; I forgot that, in speaking thus, I am attacking your sovereign power."

"I assure you, my dear sister, it was not I who dismissed the Duke of Buckingham; I was very much charmed with him."—"It was not you?" said Madame, cleverly; "ah, so much the better!" and she emphasised the "so much the better" as if she had instead said, "so much the worse."

A few minutes' silence ensued. Madame then resumed: "The Duke of Buckingham having left,—I now know why and by whose means,—I thought I should have recovered my tranquillity; but not at all, for all at once Monsieur finds another pretext, all at once—"—"All at once," said the king, playfully, "some one else presents himself. It is but natural; you are beautiful, Madame, and men will always love you."—"In that case," exclaimed the princess, "I shall create a solitude around me,—which indeed seems to be what is wished, and what is being prepared for me; but no, I prefer to return to London. There I am known and appreciated; I shall have friends without fearing that they may be regarded as my lovers. Shame! it is a disgraceful suspicion, and unworthy a gentleman. Monsieur has lost everything in my estimation, since he has shown me that he can be the tyrant of a woman."

"Nay, nay; my brother's only fault is that of loving you."—"Love me! Monsieur love me! Ah, Sire," and she burst out laughing. "Monsieur will never love any woman," she said; "Monsieur loves himself too much. No, unhappily for me, Monsieur's jealousy is of the worst kind,—he is jealous without love."

"Confess, however," said the king, who began to be excited by this varied and animated conversation,—"confess that De Guiche loves you."—"Ah, Sire, I know nothing about that."—"You must have perceived it; a man who loves betrays himself."—"M. de Guiche has not betrayed himself."—"My dear

sister, you are defending M. de Guiche."—"I, indeed! Ah, Sire, I only needed a suspicion from yourself to complete my wretchedness."

"No, Madame, no," returned the king, hurriedly; "do not distress yourself,—nay, you are weeping. Calm yourself, I implore you!" She wept, however, and large tears fell upon her hands. The king took one of her hands in his, and kissed the tears away. She looked at him so sadly and with so much tenderness that his heart was melted. "You have no feeling, then, for De Guiche?" he said, more disturbed than became his character of mediator.

"None, absolutely none."—"Then I can reassure my brother in that respect?"—"Nothing will satisfy him, Sire. Do not believe that he is jealous. Monsieur has been badly advised by some one, and he is of an uneasy disposition."—"He may well be so when you are concerned," said the king.

Madame cast down her eyes, and was silent; the king did so likewise, holding her hand all the while. His momentary silence seemed to last an age. Madame gently withdrew her hand, and from that moment she felt that her triumph was certain, and that the field of battle was her own. "Monsieur complains," said the king, diffidently, "that you prefer the society of private individuals to his own conversation and society."

"Sire, Monsieur passes his life in looking at his face in the glass, and in plotting with the Chevalier de Lorraine all sorts of spiteful things against women."—"Oh, you are going somewhat too far!"—"I only say what is the fact. Do you observe for yourself, Sire, and you will see that I am right."—"I will observe; but in the meantime what satisfaction can I give my brother?"—"My departure."—"You repeat that word!" exclaimed the king, imprudently, as if during the last ten minutes such a change had been produced that Madame would have had all her ideas on the subject thoroughly changed.

"Sire, I cannot be happy here any longer," she said. "M. de Guiche annoys Monsieur; will he be sent away too?"—"If it be necessary, why not?" replied Louis XIV., smiling.

"Well, and after M. de Guiche,—whom, by the by, I shall regret, I warn you, Sire."—"Ah, you will regret him?"—"Certainly; he is agreeable, he has a great friendship for me, and he amuses me."—"Ah, if Monsieur were only to hear you," said the king, nettled, "do you know, I would not undertake to make it up again between you; nay, I would not even attempt it."—"Sire, can you even now prevent Monsieur from being

jealous of the first comer? I know very well that M. de Guiche is not the first."—"Again I warn you that, as a good brother, I shall take a dislike to M. de Guiche."

"Ah, Sire," said Madame, "do not, I entreat you, adopt either the sympathies or the dislikes of Monsieur! Remain the king; it will be far better for yourself and for every one else."—"You jest most charmingly, Madame; and I can well understand how even those whom you attack must adore you."—"And is that the reason why you, Sire, whom I had regarded as my defender, are about to join those who persecute me?" said Madame.

"I your persecutor! Heaven forbid!"—"Then," she continued languishingly, "grant me my request."—"What do you wish?"—"To return to England."—"Never, never!" exclaimed Louis XIV.

"I am a prisoner, then?"—"In France, yes."—"What must I do, then?"—"I will tell you, my sister. Instead of devoting yourself to friendships which are somewhat unsuitable, instead of alarming us by your retirement, remain always in our society,—do not leave us, let us live as a united family. M. de Guiche is certainly very agreeable; but if at least we do not possess his wit—"—"Ah, Sire, you know very well that you are pretending to be modest."—"No, I swear to you. One may be a king, and yet feel that he possesses fewer chances of pleasing than many other gentlemen."—"I am sure, Sire, that you do not believe a single word you are saying."

The king looked at Madame tenderly, and said, "Will you promise me one thing?"—"What is it?"—"That you will no longer waste upon strangers in your boudoir the time which you owe us. Shall we make an offensive and defensive alliance against the common enemy?"—"An alliance? With you, Sire?"—"Why not? Are you not a sovereign power?"—"But are you, Sire, a very faithful ally?"—"You shall see, Madame."

"And when shall this alliance begin?"—"This very day."—"I will draw up the treaty, and you shall sign it."—"Blindly."—"Then, Sire, I promise you wonders; you are the star of the court, and when you make your appearance everything will be resplendent."

"Oh, Madame, Madame," said Louis XIV., "you know well that there is no brilliancy which does not proceed from yourself, and that if I assume the sun as my device, it is only an emblem."—"Sire, you flatter your ally,—therefore you wish to deceive

her," said Madame, threatening the king with her roguish finger.

"What! you believe that I am deceiving you, when I assure you of my affection?"—"Yes."—"What makes you so suspicious?"—"One thing."—"What is it? I shall indeed be unhappy if I do not overcome one single thing."—"That one thing in question, Sire, is not in your power, not even in the power of Heaven."—"Tell me what it is."—"The past."

"I do not understand, Madame," said the king, precisely because he had understood her but too well. The princess took his hand in hers. "Sire," she said, "I have had the misfortune to displease you for so long a period that I have almost the right to ask myself to-day why you were able to accept me as a sister-in-law."—"Displease me! You have displeased me?"—"Nay, do not deny it, for I remember it well."

"Our alliance shall date from to-day," exclaimed the king, with a warmth that was not assumed. "You will not think any more of the past, will you? I myself am resolved that I will not. I shall always remember the present; I have it before my eyes,—look!" and he led the princess before a mirror, in which she saw herself reflected, blushing and beautiful enough to overcome a saint.—"It is all the same," she murmured; "it will not be a very strong alliance."

"Must I swear?" inquired the king, intoxicated by the voluptuous turn the whole conversation had taken.—"Oh, I do not refuse a good oath," said Madame; "it has always the semblance of security." The king knelt upon a footstool, and took hold of Madame's hand. She, with a smile which a painter could not render and which a poet only could imagine, gave him both her hands, in which he hid his burning face. Neither of them could utter a syllable. The king felt Madame withdraw her hands, caressing his face while she did so. He rose immediately and left the apartment. The courtiers remarked his heightened colour, and concluded that the scene had been a stormy one. The Chevalier de Lorraine, however, hastened to say, "Nay, be comforted, Messieurs! his Majesty is always pale when he is angry."

CHAPTER CVIII

THE ADVISERS

The king left Madame in a state of agitation which it would have been difficult even for himself to have explained. It is impossible, in fact, to explain the secret play of those strange sympathies which suddenly and apparently without any cause are excited, after many years passed in the greatest calmness and indifference, by two hearts destined to love each other. Why had Louis formerly disdained, almost hated, Madame? Why did he now find the same woman so beautiful, so captivating; and why were his thoughts not only occupied, but still more why were they so occupied about her? Why, in fact, had Madame, whose eyes and mind were sought for in another direction, shown during the last week towards the king a semblance of favour which might encourage a hope of greater intimacy?

It must not be supposed that Louis proposed to himself any plan of seduction. The tie which united Madame to his brother was, or at least would seem to him, an insuperable barrier; he was even too far removed from that barrier to perceive its existence. But on the downward path of those passions in which the heart rejoices, towards which youth impels us, no one can say where he will stop,—not even he who has in advance calculated all the chances of success or failure. As for Madame, her regard for the king may easily be explained; she was young, a coquette, and ardently fond of inspiring admiration. Hers was one of those buoyant, impetuous natures, which upon a stage would pass through coals of fire to obtain applause from the spectators. It was not surprising, then, that by a sort of progression, after having been adored by Buckingham and by De Guiche, who was superior to Buckingham,—even if it were only from that great merit so much appreciated by women, that is to say, novelty,—it was not surprising, then, we say, that the princess should raise her ambition to being admired by the king, who not only was the first person in the realm, but was one of the handsomest and wittiest men in it. As for the sudden passion with which Louis was inspired for his sister-in-law, physiology would perhaps supply the explanation of it by some hackneyed commonplace reasons, and Nature from some of her mysterious affinities. Madame had the most beautiful black

eyes in the world; Louis, eyes as beautiful, but blue. Madame was laughter-loving and unreserved in her manners; Louis, melancholy and discreet. Summoned to meet each other for the first time upon the grounds of interest and a common curiosity, these two opposite natures were mutually influenced by the contact of their reciprocal contradictions of character. Louis, when he returned to his own rooms, acknowledged to himself that Madame was the most bewitching woman of his court. Madame, left alone, delightedly thought that she had made a great impression on the king. This feeling with her, however, must remain passive, while the king could not but act with all the natural vehemence of the heated fancies of a young man, and of a young man who has but to express a wish and it is executed.

The first thing the king did was to announce to Monsieur that everything was quietly arranged,—that Madame had the greatest respect, the sincerest affection for him; but that she was of a proud and sensitive character, and that her susceptibilities were so acute as to require very careful management. Monsieur replied, in the half-sour tone of voice which he generally adopted with his brother, that he could not very well understand the susceptibilities of a woman whose conduct might, in his opinion, expose her to censorious remarks; and that if any one had a right to feel wounded, it was he, Monsieur himself, to whom that right incontestably belonged. To this the king replied in a sharp tone of voice, which showed the interest he took in his sister-in-law, "Thank Heaven, Madame is above censure."

"The censure of others certainly, I admit," said Monsieur; "but not above mine, I presume."—"Well," said the king, "all I have to say, brother, is that Madame's conduct does not deserve your censure. She certainly is heedless and peculiar in her ways, but professes the best feelings. The English character is not always well understood in France, and the liberty of English manners sometimes surprises those who do not know the extent to which this liberty is due to innocence."—"Ah!" said Monsieur, more and more piqued, "from the very moment when your Majesty absolves my wife, whom I accuse, my wife is not guilty, and I have nothing more to say."

"My brother," replied the king, hastily, for he felt the voice of conscience murmuring softly in his heart that Monsieur was not altogether wrong, "what I have said, and, above all, what I have done, was only for your happiness. I was told that you

complained of a want of confidence or attention on Madame's part, and I did not wish your uneasiness to be prolonged any further. It is part of my duty to watch over your household, as over that of the humblest of my subjects. I have seen, therefore, with the sincerest pleasure, that your apprehensions have no foundation."—"And," continued Monsieur, in an inquiring tone, and fixing his eyes upon his brother, "what your Majesty has discovered for Madame,—and I bow myself to your royal wisdom,—have you also verified it for those who have been the cause of the scandal of which I complain?"—"You are right, brother," said the king; "I will consider that point."

These words comprised an order as well as a consolation; the prince felt it to be so, and withdrew. As for Louis, he went to seek his mother again; for he felt that he had need of a more complete absolution than that which he had just received from his brother. Anne of Austria did not entertain for M. de Guiche the same reasons for indulgence that she had had for Buckingham. She perceived, at the very first words he pronounced, that Louis was not disposed to be severe, and she became so. It was one of the usual stratagems of the good queen, in order to succeed in ascertaining the truth. But Louis was no longer in his apprenticeship; already for more than a year past he had been king, and during that year he had had time to learn how to dissemble. Listening to Anne of Austria in order to permit her to disclose her own thoughts, testifying his approval only by look and by gesture, he became convinced, from certain profound glances and certain skilful insinuations, that the queen, so clear-sighted in matters of gallantry, had, if not guessed, at least suspected, his weakness for Madame. Of all his auxiliaries, Anne of Austria would be the most important to secure; of all his enemies, Anne of Austria would be the most dangerous. Louis therefore changed his manœuvres. He complained of Madame; absolved Monsieur; listened to what his mother had to say of De Guiche, as he had previously listened to what she had had to say of Buckingham; and then, when he saw that she thought she had gained a complete victory over him, he left her.

The whole of the court, that is to say, all the favourites and more intimate associates,—and they were numerous, since there were already five masters,—were assembled in the evening for the repetition of the ballet. This interval had been occupied by poor De Guiche in receiving sundry visits. Among the number was one which he hoped for and feared to nearly an equal extent. It was that of the Chevalier de Lorraine. About three

o'clock in the afternoon the chevalier entered De Guiche's rooms. His looks were most assuring. Monsieur, he said to De Guiche, was in an excellent humour, and no one could say that the slightest cloud had passed across the conjugal sky. Besides, Monsieur was not one to bear ill-will. For a very long time past, during his residence at the court, the Chevalier de Lorraine had decided that of the two sons of Louis XIII. Monsieur was the one who had inherited the father's character, —an uncertain, irresolute character, impulsively good, evilly disposed at bottom, but certainly a cipher for his friends. He had especially cheered De Guiche by pointing out to him that Madame would before long succeed in governing her husband, and that consequently that man would govern Monsieur who should succeed in influencing Madame.

To this, De Guiche, full of mistrust and presence of mind, had replied, "Yes, Chevalier; but I believe Madame to be a very dangerous person."—"In what respect?"—"In that she has perceived that Monsieur is not very passionately inclined towards women."—"Quite true," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, laughing.

"In that case Madame will choose the first one who approaches, in order to make him the object of her preference, and to bring back her husband by jealousy."—"Deep! deep!" exclaimed the chevalier.—"But true!" replied De Guiche.

But neither the one nor the other expressed his real thought. De Guiche, at the very moment when he thus attacked Madame's character, mentally asked her forgiveness from the bottom of his heart; the chevalier, while admiring De Guiche's penetration, led him blindfolded to the brink of the precipice. De Guiche then questioned him more directly upon the effect produced by the scene of the morning, and upon the still more serious effect produced by the scene at dinner. "But I have already told you that they are all laughing at it," replied the Chevalier de Lorraine; "and Monsieur himself, first of all."

"Yet," hazarded De Guiche, "I have heard that the king paid Madame a visit."—"Yes, precisely so. Madame was the only one who did not laugh, and the king went to her in order to make her laugh too."—"So that—"—"So that nothing is altered in the arrangements of the day."—"And is there a repetition of the ballet this evening?"—"Certainly."—"Are you sure?"—"Quite so," returned the chevalier.

At this moment of the conversation between the two young men, Raoul entered, looking full of anxiety. As soon as the

chevalier—who had a secret dislike for him, as for every other noble character—perceived him enter, he rose from his seat.

"What do you advise me to do, then?" inquired De Guiche of the chevalier.—"I advise you to go to sleep with perfect tranquillity, my dear count."

"And my advice, De Guiche," said Raoul, "would be the very opposite."—"What is that?"—"To mount your horse and set off at once for one of your estates. On your arrival, follow the chevalier's advice, if you like; and what is more, you can sleep there as long and as tranquilly as may be agreeable to you."

"What! go away?" exclaimed the chevalier, feigning surprise; "why should De Guiche go away?"—"Because—and you particularly cannot be ignorant of it—because every one is talking about the scene which has passed between Monsieur and De Guiche." De Guiche turned pale. "Not at all," replied the chevalier, "not at all; and you have been wrongly informed, M. de Bragelonne."—"I have been perfectly well informed, on the contrary, Monsieur," replied Raoul; "and the advice I give De Guiche is that of a friend."

During this discussion De Guiche, somewhat shaken, looked alternately first at one and then at the other of his advisers. He inwardly felt that a game important in all its consequences for the rest of his life was being played at that moment.

"Is it not the fact," said the chevalier, putting the question to the count himself,—"is it not the fact, De Guiche, that the scene was not so stormy as M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne seems to think? Moreover, he was not himself there."—"Monsieur," persisted Raoul, "stormy or not, it is not precisely of the scene itself that I am speaking, but of the consequences that may ensue. I know that Monsieur has threatened, and I know that Madame has been in tears."

"Madame in tears!" exclaimed De Guiche, imprudently clasping his hands.—"Ah, indeed!" said the chevalier, laughing, "this is indeed a circumstance with which I was not acquainted. You are decidedly better informed than I am, M. de Bragelonne."—"And it is precisely because I am better informed than yourself, Chevalier, that I insist upon De Guiche's leaving."—"No, no, once more I regret to differ from you, Monsieur the Viscount; but his departure is unnecessary. Why, indeed, should he leave? Tell us why!"—"The king!"—"The king!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Yes; I tell you the king has taken up the affair."—"Bah!"

said the chevalier; "the king likes De Guiche, and particularly his father. Reflect that if the count were to leave, it would be an admission that he had done something which merited rebuke." —"Why so?"—"No doubt of it; when one runs away, it is either from guilt or from fear."—"Or because a man is offended because he is wrongfully accused," said Bragelonne. "We will assign as a reason for his departure that he feels hurt and injured, —nothing will be easier; we will say that we both did our utmost to keep him, and you at least will not be telling an untruth. Come, De Guiche, you are innocent; and being so, the scene of to-day must have wounded you. So set off, De Guiche! be off!"

"No, De Guiche, remain where you are," said the chevalier, —"precisely as M. de Bragelonne has put it, because you are innocent. Once more, forgive me, Viscount; but my opinion is the very opposite to your own."—"And you are at perfect liberty to maintain it, Monsieur; but observe that the exile which De Guiche will voluntarily impose upon himself will be of short duration. He can terminate it whenever he pleases, and returning from his voluntary exile, he will meet with smiles from all lips; while, on the contrary, the anger of the king may draw down a storm upon his head, the end of which no one can foresee."

The chevalier smiled, and murmured to himself, "*Pardieu!* that is the very thing I wish;" and at the same time he shrugged his shoulders,—a movement which did not escape the count, who dreaded, if he left the court, to seem to yield to a feeling of fear. "No, no; I have decided," he exclaimed. "Bragelonne, I stay."—"I prophesy, then," said Raoul, sadly, "that misfortune will befall you, De Guiche."—"I, too, am a prophet, but not a prophet of evil; on the contrary, Count, I say to you remain."

"Are you sure," inquired De Guiche, "that the repetition of the ballet still takes place?"—"Quite sure."—"Well, you see, Raoul," continued De Guiche, endeavouring to smile, "you see that the court is not so very sorrowful, or so readily disposed to internal dissensions, when dancing is carried on with such assiduity. Come, acknowledge that," said the count to Raoul, who shook his head, replying,—"I have nothing further to say."

"But really," inquired the chevalier, curious to learn from what source Raoul had obtained his information, the exactitude of which he was inwardly forced to admit, "you say you are well informed, Monsieur the Viscount. How can you be better

informed than myself, who am one of the prince's most intimate companions?"—"Monsieur," said Raoul, "to such a declaration I submit. You certainly ought to be perfectly well informed, I acknowledge; and as a man of honour is incapable of saying anything but what he knows to be true, or of speaking otherwise than what he thinks, I shall say no more, but confess myself defeated, and leave you in possession of the field of battle." Whereupon Raoul, who now seemed only to care to be left quiet, threw himself upon a large couch, while the count summoned his servants to aid him in dressing.

The chevalier, finding that time was passing away, wished to leave; but he feared, too, that Raoul, left alone with De Guiche, might yet influence him to change his resolution. He therefore made use of his last resource. "Madame," he said, "will be brilliant; she appears to-night in her costume of Pomona."—"Ah, that is true!" exclaimed the count.

"And she has just given directions accordingly," continued the chevalier. "You know, M. de Bragelonne, that the king is to appear as Spring."—"It will be admirable," said De Guiche; "and that is a better reason for me to remain than any you have yet given, because I am to appear as Autumn, and shall have to dance with Madame. I cannot absent myself without the king's orders, since my departure would interrupt the ballet."—"I," said the chevalier, "am to be only a simple *égypan;* it is true that I am a bad dancer and my legs are not well made. Monsieur, *au revoir!* Do not forget the basket of fruit which you are to offer to Pomona, Count!"—"Oh, be assured," said De Guiche, enraptured, "I shall forget nothing."

"I am now quite certain that he will not go away," murmured the Chevalier de Lorraine to himself as he went out. Raoul, when the chevalier had left, did not even attempt to dissuade his friend, for he felt that it would be trouble thrown away; he merely observed to the count, in his melancholy and melodious voice: "You are entering upon a most dangerous passion, Count. I know you well; you go to extremes in everything, and she whom you love does so too. Admitting for an instant that she should come to love you—"—"Oh, never!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Why do you say never?"—"Because it would be a great misfortune for both of us."—"In that case, my dear friend, instead of regarding you as simply imprudent, I cannot but consider you as absolutely mad."—"Why?"—"Are you perfectly sure—mind, answer me frankly—that you desire

nothing of her whom you love?"—"Oh, yes; quite sure!"—"Love her then at a distance."

"What! at a distance?"—"Certainly; what matters being present or absent, since you expect nothing from her? Love a portrait, a remembrance!"—"Raoul!"—"Love a shadow, an illusion, a chimera; love love itself, by giving a name to your ideal. Ah! you turn away; your servants approach; I shall say no more. In good or bad fortune, De Guiche, depend upon me."—"Indeed I shall do so."

"Very well; that is all I had to say to you. Spare no pains in your person, De Guiche, and look your very best. Adieu!"—"You will not be present, then, at the repetition of the ballet, Viscount?"—"No; I have a visit to pay in town. Farewell, De Guiche!"

The reception was to take place in the king's apartments. In the first place, there were the queens, then Madame, and a few ladies of honour who had been selected. A great number of courtiers, also carefully selected, occupied the time before the dancing began in conversing, as people knew how to converse in those times. None of the ladies who had received invitations appeared in the costumes of the *fête*, as the Chevalier de Lorraine had predicted; but many conversations took place about the rich and ingenious toilets designed by different painters for the ballet of "The Demigods,"—for thus were termed the kings and queens of whom Fontainebleau was about to become the Pantheon. Monsieur arrived, holding in his hand a drawing representing his character; he still looked somewhat uneasy. He bowed most courteously and affectionately to the young queen and to his mother, but saluted Madame almost cavalierly, and then turned upon his heel. This movement and his coldness of manner were observed by all. M. de Guiche indemnified the princess by a look of passionate devotion; and it must be admitted that Madame, as she raised her eyes, returned it to him with usury. It is unquestionable that De Guiche had never looked so handsome, for Madame's glance had in some way lighted up the features of the son of the Maréchal de Grammont.

The king's sister-in-law felt a storm mustering above her head; she felt, too, that during the whole of the day, so pregnant with future events, she had acted unjustly, if not very treasonably, towards one who loved her with such a depth of devotion. The moment seemed to her to have arrived for an acknowledgment to the poor victim of the injustice of the morning. Her heart spoke, and murmured the name of De Guiche; the count

was sincerely pitied, and accordingly gained the victory over all others. Neither Monsieur nor the king nor the Duke of Buckingham was any longer thought of; and De Guiche at that moment reigned without a rival. Monsieur also looked very handsome; still he could not be compared to the count. It is well known — indeed, all women say so — that a very wide difference invariably exists between the good looks of a lover and those of a husband. Besides, in the present case, after Monsieur had left, and after the courteous and affectionate recognition of the young queen and of the queen-mother and the careless and indifferent notice of Madame, which all the courtiers had remarked,—all these incidents, we say, in that combination gave the lover the advantage over the husband. Monsieur was too great a personage to notice these details. Nothing is so certain as a well-settled idea of superiority to prove the inferiority of the man who has that opinion of himself.

The king arrived. Every one looked for what might possibly happen, in the glance which began to bestir the world, like the brow of Jupiter Tonans. Louis had none of his brother's gloominess, but was perfectly radiant. Having examined a greater part of the drawings which were displayed for his inspection on every side, he gave his opinion or his criticism upon them, and in this manner rendered some happy and others unhappy by a single word. Suddenly his glance, which was smilingly directed towards Madame, detected the silent correspondence which was established between the princess and the count. He bit his royal lips, but when he opened them again to utter a few commonplace remarks, he said, advancing towards the queens: "Mesdames, I have just been informed that everything is now prepared at Fontainebleau, in accordance with my directions." A murmur of satisfaction arose from the different groups, and the king perceived on every face the greatest anxiety to receive an invitation for the festivities. "I shall leave to-morrow," he added. Whereupon there was the profoundest silence in the assemblage. "And I invite," said the king, finishing, "all those who are now present to get ready to accompany me." Smiling faces were now everywhere visible, with the exception of Monsieur, who seemed to retain his ill-humour. The different noblemen and ladies of the court thereupon defiled before the king, one after the other, in order to thank his Majesty for the great honour of the invitation. When it came to De Guiche's turn, the king said, "Ah, Monsieur, I did not see you." The count bowed, and Madame turned pale.

De Guiche was about to open his lips to express his thanks, when the king said, "Count, this is the season for the second sowing of crops; I am sure that your tenants in Normandy will be glad to see you upon your estate."

The king, after this cruel blow, turned his back to the unhappy man, whose turn it was now to become pale; he advanced a few steps towards the king, forgetting that his Majesty is never spoken to except in reply to questions addressed. "I have perhaps misunderstood your Majesty," he stammered out. The king turned his head slightly, and with a cold and stern glance, which plunged like a sword relentlessly into the hearts of those under disgrace, repeated, "I said, Retire to your estates," allowing every syllable to fall slowly one by one.

A cold perspiration bedewed the count's face; his hands convulsively opened; and his hat, which he held between his trembling fingers, fell to the ground. Louis sought his mother's glance, as though to show her that he was master; he sought his brother's triumphant look, as if to ask him if he were satisfied with the vengeance taken; and lastly, his eyes fell upon Madame. But the princess was talking and smiling with Madame de Noailles. She had heard nothing, or rather pretended to have heard nothing. The Chevalier de Lorraine looked on, also, with one of those looks of settled hostility which seem to give to a man's glance the power of a lever when it raises an obstacle, wrests it away, and casts it to a distance.

M. de Guiche was left alone in the king's cabinet, the whole of the company having departed. Shadows danced before his eyes. He suddenly broke through the fixed despair which overwhelmed him, and flew to hide himself in his own rooms, where Raoul still awaited him, confident in his own sad presentiments. "Well," murmured the latter, seeing his friend enter, bareheaded, with a wild gaze and tottering steps.

"Yes, yes, it is true," said De Guiche, unable to utter more, and falling exhausted upon the couch.—"And she?" inquired Raoul.—"She!" exclaimed his unhappy friend, as he raised his hand, clinched in anger towards heaven. "She!—"—"What did she say and do?"—"She said that her dress suited her admirably, and then she laughed." A fit of hysteric laughter seemed to shatter the nerves of the poor exile; for he fell backwards, completely overcome.

CHAPTER CIX

FONTAINEBLEAU

For four days every kind of enchantment brought together in the magnificent gardens of Fontainebleau had converted this spot into a place of delight. M. Colbert seemed gifted with ubiquity. In the morning there were the accounts of the previous night's expenses to settle; during the day, programmes, essays, enlistments, payments. M. Colbert had secured four million livres, and disposed of them with wise economy. He was dismayed at the expenses which mythology involved; every wood-nymph, every dryad, did not cost less than a hundred livres a day. The dress alone amounted to three hundred livres. The expense for powder and sulphur for fireworks amounted, every night, to a hundred thousand livres. In addition to these, the illuminations on the borders of the sheet of water cost thirty thousand livres every evening. The *fêtes* had been magnificent; and Colbert could not restrain his delight. From time to time he noticed Madame and the king setting forth on hunting expeditions, or preparing for the reception of different fantastic personages,—solemn ceremonials, which had been extemporised a fortnight before, and in which Madame's sparkling wit and the king's magnificence were equally displayed.

For Madame, the heroine of the *fête*, replied to the addresses of the deputations from unknown races,—Garamanthians, Scythians, Hyperboreans, Caucasians, and Patagonians,—who seemed to issue from the ground for the purpose of approaching her with their congratulations; and upon every representative of these races the king bestowed a diamond, or some other article of value. Then the deputies, in verses more or less amusing, compared the king to the sun, and Madame to Phœbe, the sun's sister; and the queen and Monsieur were no more spoken of than if the king had married Madame Henrietta of England, and not Maria Theresa of Austria. The happy pair, hand in hand, imperceptibly pressing each other's fingers, drank in deep draughts the sweet beverage of adulation, by which the attractions of youth, beauty, power, and love are enhanced. Every one at Fontainebleau was amazed at the extent of the influence which Madame had so rapidly acquired over the king, and whispered among themselves that Madame was, in point of fact, the true queen; and certainly the king himself pro-

claimed it by his every thought, word, and look. He formed his wishes, he drew his inspirations from Madame's eyes, and his delight was unbounded when Madame deigned to smile upon him. And was Madame, on her side, intoxicated with the power she wielded, as she beheld every one at her feet? She herself could not tell; but what she did know was that she could frame no wish, and that she felt herself to be perfectly happy.

The result of all these changes which emanated from the royal will was that Monsieur, instead of being the second person in the kingdom, had in reality become the third. And it was now far worse than in the time when De Guiche's guitars were heard in Madame's apartments; for then, at least, Monsieur had the satisfaction of frightening away those who annoyed him. But since the departure of the enemy, who had been driven away through his alliance with the king, Monsieur had to submit to a burden heavier than his former one, but still very different. Every evening Madame returned home quite exhausted. Horse-riding, bathing in the Seine, spectacles, dinners under the leafy covert of the trees, balls on the banks of the grand canal, concerts,—all this would have been sufficient to kill, not a slight and delicate woman, but the strongest Swiss porter in the château. It is true that with regard to dancing, concerts, and promenades a woman is far stronger than the most robust son of the thirty cantons. But however great a woman's strength may be, there is a limit to it, and she cannot hold out long under such a system. As for Monsieur, he had not even the satisfaction of witnessing Madame's abdication of her royalty in the evening, for she lived in the royal pavilion with the young queen and the queen-mother. As a matter of course, M. le Chevalier de Lorraine did not quit Monsieur, and did not fail to distil his drops of gall into every wound the latter received.

The result was that Monsieur—who had at first been in the highest spirits, completely restored since Guiche's departure—subsided into his melancholy state three days after the court was installed at Fontainebleau. Now it happened that one day about two o'clock in the afternoon Monsieur, who had risen late and had bestowed upon his toilet more than his usual attention—it happened, we repeat, that Monsieur, who had not heard of any plans having been arranged for the day, formed the project of collecting his own court, and of carrying Madame off with him to take supper at Moret, where he possessed a charming country-house. He accordingly went to the queens' pavilion, and was astonished on entering to find none of the royal servants in

attendance. Quite alone, therefore, he entered the rooms,—a door on the left opening to Madame's apartment, the one on the right to the young queen's. In his wife's apartment Monsieur was informed by a sempstress who was working there, that every one had left at eleven o'clock to go and bathe in the Seine, that a grand *fête* was to be made of the expedition, that all the carriages had been brought to the park gates, and that they had all set out more than an hour before. "Very good," said Monsieur; "the idea is a good one. The heat is very oppressive, and I have no objection to bathe too."

He summoned his servants, but no one came. He summoned those in attendance on Madame, but everybody had gone out. He then went to the stables, where he was informed by a groom that there were no carriages of any description. He then desired that a couple of horses should be saddled,—one for himself, and the other for his valet. The groom told him politely that there were no more horses. Monsieur, pale with anger, again went up to the queens' apartments, and penetrated as far as Anne of Austria's oratory, where he perceived, through the half-opened tapestry-hangings, his young sister-in-law on her knees before the queen-mother and apparently weeping. He had not been either seen or heard. He cautiously approached the opening and listened, the sight of so much grief having aroused his curiosity. Not only was the young queen weeping, but she was complaining also. "Yes," she said, "the king neglects me; the king devotes himself to pleasures and amusements only, in which I have no share."

"Patience, patience, my daughter!" said Anne of Austria, in Spanish; and then, also in Spanish, added some words of advice which Monsieur did not understand. The queen replied by accusations, mingled with sobs and tears, among which Monsieur often distinguished the word *banos*, which Maria Theresa emphasised with spiteful anger. "The baths," said Monsieur to himself,—"it seems it is the baths that have put her out;" and he endeavoured to put together the disconnected phrases which he had been able to understand from time to time. It was easy to see that the queen was complaining bitterly, and that, if Anne of Austria did not console her, she at least endeavoured to do so. Monsieur was afraid to be detected listening at the door, and he therefore adopted the expedient of coughing. The two queens turned round at the sound, and Monsieur entered.

At the sight of the prince the young queen rose precipitately

and dried her tears. Monsieur knew the people he had to deal with too well to ask questions, and was naturally too polite to remain silent; and he accordingly saluted them. The queen-mother smiled pleasantly at him, saying, "What do you want, my son?"—"I?—nothing," stammered Monsieur; "I was looking for—"—"Whom?"—"I was looking for Madame."

"Madame is at the baths."—"And the king?" said Monsieur, in a tone which made the queen tremble.—"The king also, and the whole court as well," replied Anne of Austria.—"Without you, Madame?" said Monsieur.—"Oh! I," said the young queen.—"I frighten all those who amuse themselves."—"And I, too, it seems," said Monsieur.

Anne of Austria silently made a sign to her daughter-in-law, who withdrew weeping. Monsieur's brows contracted as he remarked, "What a cheerless house! What do you think of it, mother?"—"Why, no; everybody here is pleasure-hunting."—"Yes, indeed; that is the very thing which makes those dull who do not care for pleasure."—"In what a tone you say that, my dear Philip!"—"Upon my word, Madame, I speak as I think."

"Explain yourself. What is the matter?"—"Ask my sister-in-law, rather, who just now was relating all her grievances to you."—"Her grievances! What—"—"Yes, I was listening,—accidentally, I confess, but still I listened,—so that I heard only too well my sister complain of those famous baths of Madame—"—"What folly!"—"No, no, no; people are not always foolish when they weep. The queen said *banos;* does not that mean baths?"

"I repeat, my son," said Anne of Austria, "that your sister-in-law is most childishly jealous."—"In that case, Madame," replied the prince, "I too must with great humility accuse myself of possessing the same defect which she has."—"You also, my son?"—"Certainly."—"Are you too really jealous of these baths?"—"And why not, Madame, when the king goes to the baths with my wife, and does not take the queen? Why not, when Madame goes to the baths with the king, and does not do me the honour to tell me of it? And you require my sister-in-law to be satisfied, and require me to be satisfied too."

"But, my dear Philip," said Anne of Austria, "you are raving. You have driven the Duke of Buckingham away; you have had M. de Guiche exiled; do you now wish to send the king away from Fontainebleau?"—"I do not pretend to anything of the kind, Madame," said Monsieur, bitterly; "but

at least I can withdraw, and I shall do so."—"Jealous of the king,—jealous of your brother?"—"Yes, Madame, I am jealous of the king,—of my own brother; and very jealous too."—"Really, Monsieur," exclaimed Anne of Austria, affecting to be indignant and angry, "I begin to believe that you are mad, and a sworn enemy to my repose! I therefore abandon the place to you, for I have no means of defending myself against such wild conceptions."

She arose and left Monsieur a prey to a curious fit of passion. He remained for a moment completely bewildered; then, recovering himself in order completely to regain his strength, he again went to the stables, found the groom, once more asked him for a carriage or a horse, and upon his replying that there was neither the one nor the other, snatched a long whip from the hand of a stable-boy and began to pursue the poor devil of a groom all round the servants' courtyard, whipping him all the while in spite of his cries and his excuses; then, quite out of breath, covered with perspiration, and trembling in every limb, he returned to his own apartments, broke in pieces his most beautiful specimens of porcelain, and then got into bed, booted and spurred as he was, crying out for help.

CHAPTER CX

THE BATH

At Valvins, beneath the impenetrable shade of flowering osiers and willows, which, as they bent down their green heads, dipped the extremities of their branches in the blue waters, a long and flat-bottomed boat with ladders covered with long blue curtains served as a refuge for the bathing Dianas, who, as they left the water, were watched by twenty plumed Actæons, who eagerly and full of desire galloped up and down the moss-grown and sweet-smelling banks of the river. But Diana herself—even the modest Diana, clothed in her long chlamys—was less chaste, less impenetrable, than Madame, young and beautiful as the goddess herself. For, notwithstanding the fine tunic of the huntress, her round and white knee could be seen, and notwithstanding the sonorous quiver, her brown shoulders could be detected; whereas in Madame's case a long white veil enveloped her, wrapping her round and round a hundred times as she resigned herself into the hands of her female attendants, and thus was rendered

inaccessible to the most indiscreet as well as to the most penetrating gaze. When she ascended the ladder, the poets who were present,—and all were poets when Madame was the subject of discussion,—the twenty poets who were galloping about stopped and with one voice exclaimed that pearls, and not drops of water, were falling from her person, to be lost again in the happy river. The king, the centre of these effusions and of this homage, imposed silence upon those expatiators, whose raptures were inexhaustible, and rode away for fear of offending even under the silken curtains the modesty of the woman and the dignity of the princess. A great blank thereupon ensued in the scene, and a perfect silence in the boat. From the movements on board—from the flutterings and agitations of the curtains—the goings to and fro of the female attendants engaged in their duties could be guessed.

The king smilingly listened to the conversation of the gentlemen around him, but it could easily be perceived that he gave but little if any attention to their remarks. In fact, hardly had the sound of the rings sliding along the curtain-rods announced that Madame was dressed and that the goddess was about to make her appearance, than the king, returning to his former post immediately, and running quite close to the river-bank, gave the signal for all those to approach whose attendance or pleasure summoned them to Madame's side. The pages hurried forward, conducting the led horses; the carriages, which had remained sheltered under the trees, advanced towards the tent, followed by a crowd of servants, bearers, and female attendants, who while their masters had been bathing had mutually exchanged their own observations, their critical remarks, and the discussion of matters of interest,—the fugitive journal of that period, of which no record is preserved, not even by the waters, the mirror of individuals, echo of conversations,—witnesses whom Heaven has hurried into immensity as he has hurried the actors themselves into eternity.

All this crowd of people swarming upon the banks of the river, without reckoning the groups of peasants attracted by their anxiety to see the king and the princess, occasioned for many minutes the most disorderly but the most agreeable confusion imaginable. The king dismounted from his horse,—a movement which was imitated by all the courtiers,—and offered his hand to Madame, whose rich riding-habit displayed her elegant figure, which was set off to great advantage by that garment, made of fine woollen cloth embroidered with silver.

Her hair, still damp, and blacker than jet, hung in heavy masses upon her white and delicate neck. Joy and health sparkled in her beautiful eyes; composed, and yet full of energy, she inhaled the air in deep draughts under the embroidered parasol which was borne by one of her pages. Nothing could be more charming, more graceful, more poetical, than these two figures buried under the rose-coloured shade of the parasol,—the king, whose white teeth were displayed in continual smiles; and Madame, whose black eyes sparkled like two carbuncles in the glittering reflection of the changing hues of the silk.

When Madame approached her horse,—a magnificent Andalusian pacer of spotless white, somewhat heavy, perhaps, but with a spirited and slender head, in which the mixture so happily combined of Arabian and Spanish blood could be readily traced, and whose long tail swept the ground,—and affected difficulty in mounting, the king took her in his arms in such a manner that Madame's arm was clasped like a circlet of fire around the king's neck. Louis, as he withdrew, involuntarily touched with his lips the arm, which was not withheld, and the princess having thanked her royal equerry, every one sprang to his saddle at once. The king and Madame drew aside to allow the carriages, the outriders, and runners to pass by. A fair proportion of the cavaliers, released from the restraint which etiquette had imposed on them, gave the rein to their horses, and darted after the carriages which bore the maids of honour, as blooming as so many Oreades around Diana; and the whirlwind, laughing, chattering, and noisy, passed onward.

The king and Madame kept their horses in hand at a footpace. Behind his Majesty and the princess his sister-in-law, certain of the courtiers—either seriously disposed, or anxious to be within reach or under the eyes of the king—followed at a respectful distance, restraining their impatient horses, regulating their pace by the steeds of the king and Madame, and abandoned themselves to all the delight and gratification which is to be found in the conversation of clever people, who can with perfect courtesy utter a thousand of the most atrocious aspersions on their neighbours. In their stifled laughter and in the little reticences of their sardonic humour, Monsieur, the poor absentee, was not spared. But they pitied and bewailed greatly the fate of De Guiche; and it must be confessed that their compassion, so far as he was concerned, was not misplaced. Meanwhile the king and Madame, having breathed their horses, and repeated a hundred times over such remarks as the courtiers,

who made them talk, had suggested to them, set off at a hand-gallop, and the shady avenues of the forest resounded to the heavy footfall of the mounted party. To the murmured conversations—to the remarks made in the character of confidential communications, and to the observations exchanged as it were mysteriously—succeeded the loudest bursts of laughter; from the very outriders to royalty itself merriment seemed to spread. Every one began to laugh and to cry out. The magpies and the jays flew away, uttering their guttural cries, beneath the waving arches of the oaks; the cuckoo stayed his monotonous cry in the recesses of the forest; the chaffinches and tomtits flew away in clouds; while the roebucks and the fallow-deer bounded away, terrified, into the midst of the thickets. This crowd, spreading widely joy, confusion, and light wherever it passed, was preceded, it may be said, to the château by its own clamour.

As the king and Madame entered the village, they were both received by the general acclamations of the crowd. Madame hastened to look for Monsieur, for she instinctively understood that he had been far too long kept from sharing in this enjoyment. The king went to rejoin the queens; he knew he owed them—one especially—a compensation for his long absence. But Madame was not admitted to Monsieur's apartments, and she was informed that Monsieur was asleep. The king, instead of being met by Maria Theresa smiling, as was usual with her, found Anne of Austria in the gallery, watching for his return, who advanced to meet him, and taking him by the hand led him to her own apartment. No one ever knew what they said to each other, or rather what the queen-mother said to Louis XIV.; but it certainly might easily be guessed from the annoyed expression of the king's face as he came away from that interview.

But we, whose mission it is to interpret all things, as it is also to communicate our interpretations to our readers,—we should fail in our duty, if we were to leave them in ignorance of the result of this interview. It will be found sufficiently detailed—at least we hope so—in the following chapter.

CHAPTER CXI

THE BUTTERFLY-CHASE

THE king, on retiring to his apartments to give some directions and to arrange his ideas, found on his toilet-glass a small note, the handwriting of which seemed disguised. He opened it and read: "Come quickly! I have a thousand things to say to you." The king and Madame had not been separated a sufficiently long time for these thousand things to be the result of the three thousand which they had been saying to each other during the journey which separated Valvins from Fontainebleau. The confused and hurried character of the note, too, gave the king a great deal to reflect upon. He occupied himself but slightly with his toilet, and set off to pay his visit to Madame. The princess, who did not wish to have the appearance of expecting him, had gone into the gardens with all her ladies. When the king was informed that Madame had left her apartments to go out for a walk, he collected all the gentlemen he could find at hand, and invited them to follow him to the gardens. Madame was engaged in chasing butterflies on a large lawn bordered with heliotrope and flowering broom. She was looking on, as the most adventurous and youngest of her ladies ran to and fro, and with her back turned to the hedge very impatiently awaited the arrival of the king, to whom she had given the rendezvous. The sound of many feet upon the gravel-walk made her turn round. Louis XIV. was bareheaded; he had struck down with his cane a peacock-butterfly, which M. de Saint-Aignan had picked up from the grass quite stunned. "You see, Madame," said the king, as he approached her, "that I too am hunting for you;" and then, turning to the gentlemen who formed his retinue, said, "Messieurs, see if each of you cannot obtain as much for these ladies,"—a remark which was a signal for all to retire. And thereupon a curious spectacle might be observed: old and corpulent courtiers ran after butterflies, losing their hats as they ran, and with their raised canes cutting down the myrtles and the furze, as they would have cut down the Spaniards.

The king offered Madame his arm, and they both selected, as a centre of observation, a bench with a roofing of moss,—a kind of hut roughly designed by the modest genius of some

gardener who had introduced the picturesque and the fanciful amid the formal style of gardening of that period. This sheltered retreat, covered with nasturtiums and climbing roses, screened a bench without a back: so that the spectators within, insulated in the middle of the lawn, saw and were seen on every side, but could not be heard, without perceiving those who might approach for the purpose of listening. Seated thus, the king made a sign of encouragement to the hunters; and then, as if he were engaged with Madame in a dissertation upon the butterfly, which he had thrust through with a gold pin and fastened on his hat, said to her, "How admirably we are placed here for conversation!"—"Yes, Sire, for I wished to be heard by you alone, and yet to be seen by every one."—"And I also," said Louis.

"My note surprised you?"—"Terrified me, rather. But what I have to tell you is more important."—"Oh, no, indeed! Do you know that Monsieur has closed his door against me?"—"Why so?"—"Can you not guess why?"—"Ah, Madame! in that case we have both the same thing to say to each other."

"What has happened to you, then?"—"You wish me to begin?"—"Yes, for I have told you all."—"Well, then, as soon as I returned, I found my mother waiting for me, and she led me away to her own apartments."—"Oh! the queen-mother?" said Madame, with some anxiety; "that is serious."

"Indeed it is, for this is what she told me— But in the first place allow me to preface what I have to say with one remark. Has Monsieur ever spoken to you about me?"—"Often."—"Has he ever spoken to you about his jealousy?"—"Oh, more frequently still!"—"Of his jealousy of me?"—"No, but of Buckingham and De Guiche."—"Well, Madame, Monsieur's present idea is to be jealous of myself."—"Really," replied the princess, smiling archly.

"And it really seems to me," continued the king, "that we have never given any ground—"—"Never! at least I have not. But how did you learn about Monsieur's jealousy?"—"My mother represented to me that Monsieur entered her apartments like a madman; that he uttered a thousand complaints against you, and—forgive me for saying it—against your coquetry. It appears that Monsieur indulges in injustice too."—"You are very kind, Sire."—"My mother reassured him; but he pretended that people reassure him too often, and that he had had quite enough of it."—"Would it not be better for him not to make himself uneasy in any way?"—"The very thing I said."

"Confess, Sire, that the world is very wicked. Is it possible that a brother and sister cannot converse together, or take pleasure in each other's society, without giving rise to remarks and suspicions? For indeed, Sire, we are doing no harm, and have no intention of doing any;" and she looked at the king with that proud and provoking glance which kindles desire in the coldest and wisest of men.—"No," sighed Louis; "that is true."—"Know well, Sire, that if this were to continue, I should be obliged to make a disturbance. Do you decide upon our conduct, and say whether it has, or has not, been perfectly correct."—"Oh! certainly,—perfectly correct."—"Often alone together,—for we delight in the same things,—we might possibly be led away into error, but have we done so? I regard you as a brother, and nothing more." The king frowned. She continued: "Your hand, which often meets my own, does not excite in me that agitation and emotion which lovers, for instance—"

"Enough," said the king, in torture,—"enough, I entreat you! You have no pity,—you are killing me."—"What is the matter?"—"In fact, then, you distinctly say that you experience nothing when near me."—"Oh, Sire! I do not say that,—my affection—"—"Enough, Henrietta, I again entreat you! If you believe me to be marble, as you are, undeceive yourself."—"I do not understand you."—"Very well," sighed the king, casting down his eyes. "And so our meetings, the pressure of each other's hands, the looks we have exchanged—Yes, yes; you are right, and I understand your meaning;" and he buried his face in his hands.

"Take care, Sire!" said Madame, hurriedly; "here is M. de Saint-Aignan looking at you."—"Of course," said Louis, angrily; "never even the shadow of liberty, never any sincerity in my intercourse with any one! I imagine I have found a friend, and he is nothing but a spy; a dearer friend, and she is only a—sister!" Madame was silent, and cast down her eyes. "My husband is jealous," she murmured, in a tone whose charm and sweetness could not be equalled.—"Oh!" exclaimed the king, suddenly, "you are right."

"You see," she said, looking at him in a manner that set his heart on fire, "you are free, you are not suspected; the peace of your house is not disturbed."—"Alas! as yet you know nothing, for the queen is jealous."—"Maria Theresa!"—"Perfectly mad with jealousy! Monsieur's jealousy arises from hers. She was weeping and complaining to my mother, and was

reproaching us for those bathing-parties, so pleasant to me."—"And me too," answered Madame by a look.

"When suddenly," continued the king, "Monsieur, who was listening, heard the word *banos*, which the queen pronounced with some degree of bitterness; that awakened his attention. He entered the room, looking quite wild, broke into the conversation, and began to quarrel with my mother so bitterly that she was obliged to escape from his presence; so that while you have a jealous husband to deal with, I shall have perpetually present before me an inexorable spectre of jealousy, with swollen eyes, a cadaverous face, and sinister looks."—"Poor king!" murmured Madame, letting her hand lightly brush against that of Louis. Louis retained her hand in his; and in order to press it without exciting suspicion in the spectators, who were not so much taken up with hunting the butterflies that they could not hunt for news and seek to learn some secret from the interview of the king and Madame, he placed the dying butterfly before his sister-in-law, and both bent over it as if to count the thousand eyes on its wings or the particles of golden dust which covered it. But neither of them spoke; however, their hair mingled, their breath united, and their hands feverishly throbbed in each other's grasp. Five minutes passed by in this manner.

CHAPTER CXII

WHAT WAS CAUGHT IN CHASING BUTTERFLIES

THE two young people remained for a moment with their heads bent down, bowed as it were beneath the mutual consciousness of nascent love which at twenty years of age gives birth to so many happy fancies. Madame Henrietta gave a side glance from time to time at Louis. Hers was one of those finely organised natures capable of looking inwardly at itself as well as at others at the same moment. She perceived love lying at the bottom of Louis's heart, as a skilful diver sees a pearl at the bottom of the sea. She knew that the king was hesitating, if not in doubt, and that his indolent or timid heart required aid and encouragement. "Consequently?" she said interrogatively, breaking the silence.—"What do you mean?" inquired Louis, after a moment's pause.

"I mean that I shall be obliged to return to the resolution I had formed."—"To what resolution?"—"To that which I

have already submitted to your Majesty."—"When?"—"On the very day when we had a certain explanation about Monsieur's jealousies."—"What did you say to me then?" inquired Louis, with some anxiety.

"Do you not remember, Sire?"—"Alas! if it be another cause of unhappiness, I shall recollect it soon enough."—"A cause of unhappiness for myself alone, Sire," replied Madame Henrietta; "but it is a necessary misfortune, and I must submit to it."—"At least, tell me what it is," said the king.

"Absence."—"Still that unkind resolve?"—"Believe me, Sire, I have not formed it without a violent struggle with myself; it is absolutely necessary that I should return to England."—"Never, never will I permit you to leave France," exclaimed the king.

"And yet, Sire," said Madame, affecting a gentle yet sorrowful determination, "nothing is more urgently necessary; nay, more than that, I am persuaded that it is your mother's will that I should do so."—"Will!" exclaimed the king; "my dear sister, that is a very strange expression to use to me."—"Still," replied Madame Henrietta, smilingly, "are you not happy in submitting to the wishes of so good a mother?"—"Enough, I implore you; you rend my very soul!"—"I?"—"Yes; for you speak of your departure with real tranquillity."

"I was not born for happiness, Sire," replied the princess, in a melancholy tone; "and I acquired, in very early life, the habit of seeing my dearest hopes disappointed."—"Do you speak truly?" said the king. "Would your departure cross any one of your cherished thoughts?"—"If I were to say 'Yes,' is it not true, Sire, that you would begin to take your misfortune patiently?"—"How cruel you are!"

"Take care, Sire! some one is coming." The king looked all round him, and said, "No, there is no one," and then continued: "Come, Henrietta, instead of trying to contend against Monsieur's jealousy by a departure which would kill me,"—Henrietta slightly shrugged her shoulders, like a woman unconvinced,—"yes," repeated Louis, "which would kill me, I say,—instead of fixing your mind on this departure, does not your imagination, or rather does not your heart, suggest some expedient?"—"*Mon Dieu*, what is it you wish my heart to suggest?"

"Tell me, how can one prove to another that he is mistaken in his jealousy?"—"In the first place, Sire, by giving no motive for jealousy; in other words, by loving no one but the one in

question."—"Oh! I expected better than that."—"What did you expect?"—"That you would simply answer that jealous people are pacified by concealing the affection which is entertained for the object of their jealousy."

"Dissimulation is difficult, Sire."—"Yet it is only by means of conquering difficulties that any happiness is attained. So far as I am concerned, I swear I will give the lie to those who are jealous of me, if it is necessary, by pretending to treat you like any other woman."—"A bad as well as an unsafe means," said the young woman, shaking her pretty head.—"You seem to think everything bad, dear Henrietta," said Louis, discontentedly. "You refute everything I propose. Suggest, at least, something else in its stead. Come, try to think. I trust implicitly to a woman's invention. Do you invent in your turn."

"Well, Sire, I have hit upon something. Will you listen to it?"—"Can you ask me? You speak of a matter of life or death to me, and then ask if I will listen?"—"Well, I judge of it by my own feelings. If my husband intended to put me on the wrong scent with regard to another woman, one thing would reassure me more than anything else."—"What would that be?"—"In the first place, to see that he never took any notice of the woman in question."

"Exactly. That is precisely what I said just now."—"Very well; but in order to be perfectly reassured, I should wish to see him occupy himself with some one else."—"Ah! I understand you," replied Louis, smiling. "But confess, dear Henrietta, if the means is ingenious, it is hardly charitable."—"Why so?"—"In curing the dread of a wound in a jealous person's mind, you inflict one upon his heart. His fear ceases, it is true; but the evil still exists, and that seems to me to be far worse."

"Agreed. But at least he does not detect, he does not suspect, the real enemy; he does no prejudice to love itself; he concentrates all his strength on the side where his strength will do no injury to anything or any one. In a word, Sire, my plan, which I confess I am surprised to find you dispute, is mischievous to jealous people, it is true; but to lovers it is full of advantage. Besides, let me ask, Sire, who—except yourself, perhaps—has ever thought of pitying jealous people? Are they not a melancholy set of creatures, always equally unhappy, whether with or without a cause? You may remove that cause, but you do not put an end to their sufferings. It is a disease

which lies in the imagination; and like all imaginary disorders, it is incurable. By the by, I remember an aphorism upon this subject of poor Dr. Dawley,—a learned and witty man, whom had it not been for my brother, who could not do without him, I should have with me now. He used to say to me: 'Whenever you suffer from two affections, choose that which will give you the least trouble. I will leave you that; for it is certain,' he said, 'that it will be of the greatest use to me in enabling me to get rid of the other.'"

"Well and judiciously remarked, dear Henrietta," replied the king, smiling.—"Oh! we have some clever people in London, Sire."—"And those clever people produce adorable pupils. I will grant this Daley, Darley, Dawley—or whatever you call him—a pension to-morrow for his aphorism; but I entreat you, Henrietta, to begin by choosing the least of your evils. You do not answer,—you smile. I guess that the least of your evils is your stay in France. I will allow you to retain this misfortune; and in order to begin with the cure of the other, I will this very day begin to look out for a subject which shall divert the attention of the jealous members of either sex who persecute us both."

"Hush! this time some one is really coming," said Madame; and she stooped down to gather a periwinkle from the thick grass at her feet. Some one, in fact, was approaching; for suddenly a bevy of young girls ran down from the top of the little hillock, following the cavaliers,—the cause of this irruption being a magnificent hawk-moth, with its upper wings like the plumage of the tawny owl, and the lower wings like rose-leaves. The prey in question had fallen into the net of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who displayed it with some pride to her less successful rivals. The queen of the chase had seated herself some twenty paces from the bench on which were Louis and Madame Henrietta, and leaned her back against a magnificent oak-tree entwined with ivy, and stuck the butterfly on the long cane she carried in her hand. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was very beautiful; and the gentlemen accordingly deserted her companions, and under the pretext of complimenting her upon her success pressed in a circle around her. The king and the princess looked at this scene as spectators of maturer age look on at the games of little children. "They seem to be amusing themselves there," said the king.

"Greatly, Sire; I have always found that people are amused wherever youth and beauty are to be found."—"What do

you think of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Henrietta?" inquired the king.

"I think that she is rather fair in complexion," replied Madame, fixing in a moment upon the only fault it was possible to find in the almost perfect beauty of the future Madame de Montespan.

"Rather fair, yes; but beautiful, I think, in spite of that."—"Is that your opinion, Sire?"—"Yes, really."—"Well, then, it is mine too."—"And she seems to be much sought after too."—"Oh! that is a matter of course; lovers flutter from one to another. If we had hunted for lovers instead of butterflies, you can see from those who surround her what successful sport we should have had."

"Tell me, Henrietta, what would be said if the king were to make himself one of those lovers and let his glance fall in that direction? Would some one else be jealous in such a case?"—"Oh, Sire, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is a very efficacious remedy," said Madame, with a sigh. "She would cure a jealous man, certainly; but she might possibly make a woman jealous too."

"Henrietta," exclaimed Louis, "you fill my heart with joy! Yes, yes, you are right,—Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is far too beautiful to serve as a cloak."—"A king's cloak," said Madame Henrietta, smiling, "ought to be beautiful."—"Do you advise me to do it, then?" inquired Louis.

"I! What should I say, Sire, except that to give such advice would be to supply arms against myself? It would be folly or pride to advise you to take for the heroine of an assumed affection a woman more beautiful than the one for whom you pretend to feel real regard." The king tried to take Madame's hand in his own. His eyes sought hers; and then he murmured a few words full of tenderness, but pronounced in so low a tone that the historian, who ought to hear everything, could not hear them. Then, speaking aloud, he said: "Do you yourself choose for me the one who is to cure our victim of jealousy. To her, then, all my devotion, all my attention, all the time that I can spare from my occupations, shall be devoted. For her, Henrietta, shall be the flower that I may pluck for you, the fond thoughts with which you have inspired me; towards her the glance that I dare not bestow upon you, and which ought to arouse you from your indifference. But be careful in your selection, lest in trying to think of her, in offering her the rose which I may have plucked, I should find myself conquered by

yourself; and lest my looks, my hand, my lips, should not turn immediately towards you, even were the whole world to guess my secret!"

While these words escaped from the king's lips in a stream of wild affection, Madame blushed, breathless, happy, proud, almost intoxicated with delight. She could find nothing to say in reply; her pride and her thirst for homage were satisfied. "I shall fail," she said, raising her beautiful eyes, "but not as you beg me; for, ah, Sire, all this incense which you wish to burn on the altar of another divinity,—I too shall be jealous of it, and want it to be restored to me, and would not wish that a particle of it should be lost in the way. Therefore, Sire, with your royal permission, I will choose one who shall appear to me the least likely to distract your attention, and who will leave my image inviolate in your heart."—"Happily for me," said the king, "your circle of attendants is not badly made up; otherwise I should be alarmed at the threat you hold out. Our precautions have been taken on this point, and around you, as around myself, it would be difficult to meet with a disagreeable-looking face."

While the king was speaking, Madame had risen from her seat and looked around the greensward; and after a careful and silent examination she called the king to her side, and said, "See, Sire, upon the declivity of that little hill, near that clump of guelder-roses, that beautiful girl walking alone behind the others, her head down, her arms hanging by her side, with her eyes fixed upon the flowers which she crushes beneath her feet, like one who is lost in thought."—"Mademoiselle de la Vallière, do you mean?" remarked the king.

"Yes."—"Oh!"—"Will she not suit you, Sire?"—"Why, look how thin the poor child is! she has hardly any flesh upon her bones."—"Nay; am I stout, then?"—"She is so melancholy."—"The greater contrast to myself, who am accused of being too lively."—"She is lame."—"Do you think so?"—"No doubt of it; look, she has allowed every one to pass by her lest her defect should be remarked."—"Well, she will not run so fast as Daphne, and will not be able to escape Apollo."

"Henrietta," said the king, out of temper, "of all your maids of honour, you have really selected for me the one most full of defects."—"Still, she is one of my maids of honour; take note of that!"—"Of course; but what do you mean?"—"I mean that in order to visit this new divinity you will not be able to do so without paying a visit to my apartments, and that as

propriety will forbid your conversing with your goddess in private, you will be compelled to see her in my circle, to speak to me while speaking to her. I mean, in fact, that those who may be jealous will be wrong if they suppose you come to my apartments for my sake, since you will come there for Mademoiselle de la Vallière's."

"Who happens to be lame."—"Hardly that."—"Who never opens her lips."—"But who, when she does open them, displays a beautiful set of teeth."—"Who may serve as a model for an osteologist."—"Your favour will ripen her charms."

"Henrietta!"—"At all events, you have allowed me to be the mistress."—"Alas! yes."—"Well, my choice is made; I impose her upon you, and you must submit."—"Oh! I would accept one of the furies, if you were to insist upon it."—"La Vallière is as gentle as a lamb; do not fear that she will ever contradict you when you tell her you love her," said Madame, laughing.

"You are not afraid, are you, that I shall say too much to her?"—"It would be for my sake."—"Very well."—"The treaty is agreed to, then?"—"And signed."—"You will continue to show me the friendship of a brother, the attention of a brother, the gallantry of a monarch, will you not?"—"I will preserve for you a heart which can no longer beat except at your command."

"Very well. Do you not see that we have secured the future by this means?"—"I hope so."—"Will your mother cease to regard me as an enemy?"—"Yes."—"Will Maria Theresa leave off speaking in Spanish before Monsieur, who has a horror of conversations held in foreign languages, because he always thinks that he is being ill-spoken of?"—"Alas! is he wrong in that?" murmured the king, tenderly.

"And lastly," continued the princess, "will people persist in attributing a wrongful affection to the king, when the truth is, we can be nothing to each other, except in sympathy, free from all hidden designs?"—"Yes, yes," said the king, hesitatingly. "But yet other things may still be said."—"What can be said, Sire? Shall we never indeed be left in peace?"—"People will say," continued the king, "that I am wanting in taste; but what is my self-respect in comparison with your tranquillity?"—"In comparison with my honour, Sire, and that of your family, you mean. Besides, believe me, do not be so hastily prejudiced against La Vallière. She is lame, it is

true, but she is not deficient in good sense. Moreover, all that the king touches is converted into gold."

"Well, Madame, be assured of one thing,—namely, that I am still grateful to you; you might make me pay dearer for your stay in France."—"Sire, some one approaches."—"Well!"—"One last word."—"Say it!"—"You are prudent and judicious, Sire; but in the present instance you will be obliged to summon to your aid all your prudence and all your judgment."

"Oh!" exclaimed Louis, laughing, "from this very evening I shall begin to act my part, and you shall see whether I am not quite fit to play the tender swain. After luncheon there will be a grand promenade in the forest, and then there will be supper and the ballet at ten o'clock."—"I know it."—"The ardour of my passion shall blaze this evening more brilliantly than the fireworks, shall shine more steadily than the lamps of our friend Colbert; it shall shine so dazzlingly that the queens and Monsieur will be almost blinded by it."

"Take care, Sire, take care!"—"In Heaven's name, what have I done, then?"—"I shall begin to recall the compliments I paid you just now. You prudent, you wise, did I say? Why, you begin by the most reckless inconsistencies. Can a passion be kindled in this manner, like a torch, in a moment? Can a monarch like you, without any preliminaries, fall at the feet of a girl like La Vallière?"—"Ah! Henrietta, now I understand you. We have not yet begun the campaign, and you are plundering me already."—"No, I am only recalling you to sane ideas. Let your passion be kindled gradually, instead of allowing it to burst forth so suddenly. Jove's thunders and lightnings are heard and seen before the palace is set on fire. Everything has its beginning. If you are so easily excited, no one will believe that you are really captivated, and every one will think you out of your senses,—unless, indeed, the truth itself be not guessed. People are not always so foolish as they seem."

The king was obliged to admit that Madame was an angel for wisdom and a devil for cunning. He bowed, and said: "Agreed, Madame; I will think over my plan of attack. Great military men—my cousin De Condé, for instance—grow pale in meditation upon their strategical plans before they move one of the pawns which people call armies. I therefore wish to draw up a complete plan of attack, for you know that the tender passion is subdivided in all sorts of ways. Well, then, I shall stop at the village of Little Attentions, at the hamlet of Love Letters, before I follow the road of Visible Affection; the way is clear

enough, you know, and this poor Madame de Scudéry would never forgive me for passing through a halting-place without stopping."

"Oh! now that we have returned to our proper senses, shall we say adieu to each other, Sire?"—"Alas, it must be so; for, see! we are interrupted."—"Yes, indeed," said Madame Henrietta, "they are bringing us Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and her sphinx butterfly with the sound of the horn, after the manner of mighty huntsmen."

"It is perfectly well understood, then, that this evening, during the promenade, I am to make my escape into the forest, and finding La Vallière without you—"—"I will take care to send her away."—"Very well! I will speak to her when she is with her companions, and I will then discharge my first arrow at her."—"Be skilful," said Madame, laughing, "and do not miss the heart."

The princess took leave of the king, and went forward to meet the merry troop, which was advancing with much ceremony and a great many pretended flourishes of hunting-horns, which they imitated with their mouths.

CHAPTER CXIII

THE BALLET OF THE SEASONS

At the conclusion of the banquet, which had been served at five o'clock, the king entered his cabinet, where his tailors were awaiting him, for the purpose of trying on the celebrated costume representing Spring, which had cost so many efforts of imagination and sober thought to the designers and ornament-workers of the court. As for the ballet itself, every person knew the part he had to take in it, and how to perform that part. The king had resolved to make it a matter of surprise. Hardly, therefore, had he finished his conference and entered his own apartment, when he desired his two masters of the ceremonies, De Villeroy and De Saint-Aignan, to be sent for. Both replied that they only awaited his orders, and that everything was ready to begin, but that it was necessary to make sure of fine weather and a favourable night before those orders could be carried out. The king opened his window. The golden hues of evening could be seen in the horizon through the vistas of the wood; and the moon, white as snow, was already visible in the heavens. Not

a ripple on the surface of the green waters; the swans themselves even, reposing with folded wings like ships at anchor, seemed impressed by the warmth of the air, the freshness of the water, and the silence of the beautiful evening. The king, having observed all these things and contemplated the magnificent picture before him, gave the order which Messieurs de Villeroy and de Saint-Aignan awaited; but with the view of insuring the execution of this order in a royal manner, one last question was necessary, and Louis XIV. put it to the two gentlemen, in four words: "Have you any money?"

"Sire," replied De Saint-Aignan, "we have arranged everything with M. Colbert."—"Ah, very well!"—"Yes, Sire, and M. Colbert said that he would wait upon your Majesty as soon as your Majesty should manifest an intention of carrying out the festivities, of which he has furnished the programme."—"Let him come in, then," said the king; and as if Colbert had been listening at the door for the purpose of following the conversation, he entered as soon as the king had pronounced his name before the two courtiers.

"Ah, very good, M. Colbert!" said his Majesty. "Messieurs, to your posts!" whereupon De Saint-Aignan and De Villeroy took their leave. The king seated himself in an easy-chair near the window, saying, "The ballet will take place this evening, M. Colbert."—"In that case, Sire, I shall settle the accounts to-morrow."—"Why so?"—"I promised the tradespeople to pay their bills the day after that on which the ballet should take place."—"Very well, M. Colbert; pay them, since you have promised to do so."

"Certainly, Sire; but I must have money to do that."—"What! have not the four millions which M. Fouquet promised been sent? I had forgotten to ask you about that."—"Sire, they were sent to your Majesty at the hour promised."—"Well?"—"Well, Sire, the coloured lamps, the fireworks, the musicians, and the cooks have swallowed up four millions in a week."—"Entirely?"—"To the last sou. Every time that your Majesty directed the banks of the grand canal to be illuminated, as much oil was consumed as there was water in the basins."

"Well, well, M. Colbert; the fact is, then, you have no more money."—"I have no more, Sire; but M. Fouquet has," Colbert replied, his face darkening with a sinister expression of pleasure. "What do you mean?" inquired Louis.—"Sire, we have already made M. Fouquet advance six millions. He has

given them with too much readiness not to have others still to give, if they are required, which is the case at the present moment. It is necessary, therefore, that he should comply."

The king frowned. "M. Colbert," said he, accentuating the financier's name, "that is not the way I understood the matter. I do not wish against any one of my servants to make use of means which may oppress him and fetter his services. In a week M. Fouquet has furnished six millions; that is a good sum." Colbert turned pale. "And yet," he said, "your Majesty did not use this language some time ago,—when the news about Belle-Isle arrived, for instance."

"That is true, M. Colbert."—"Nothing, however, has changed since then; quite the contrary, indeed."—"In my thoughts, Monsieur, everything has changed."—"Does your majesty, then, no longer believe the attempts?"—"My own affairs concern me alone, Monsieur; and I have already told you that I transact them myself."

"Then I perceive," said Colbert, trembling with rage and fear, "that I have had the misfortune to fall into disgrace with your Majesty."—"Not at all; you are, on the contrary, most agreeable to me."—"Yet, Sire," said the minister, with a certain affected bluntness, so successful when it was a question of flattering Louis's self-esteem, "what use is there in being agreeable to your Majesty, if one can no longer be of any service to you?"—"I reserve your services for a better occasion; and, believe me, they will only be the better appreciated.—"Your Majesty's plan, then, in this affair is—"

"You want money, M. Colbert?"—"Seven hundred thousand livres, Sire."—"You will take them from my private treasure." Colbert bowed. "And," added Louis, "as it seems a difficult matter for you, notwithstanding your economy, to defray with so limited a sum the expenses which I intend to incur, I will sign you an order for three millions." The king took a pen and signed an order immediately, then handed the paper to Colbert. "Be satisfied," said he; "M. Colbert, the plan I have adopted is one worthy of a king;" and with these words, pronounced with all the majesty which the young prince knew how to assume in such circumstances, he dismissed Colbert in order to give an audience to his tailors.

The order issued by the king was known throughout Fontainebleau; it was already known, too, that the king was trying on his costume, and that the ballet would be danced in the evening. The news circulated with the rapidity of lightning; during its

progress it kindled every variety of coquetry, desire, and wild ambition. At the same moment, as if by enchantment, every one who knew how to hold a needle—every one who could distinguish doublet from hose, as Molière says—was summoned to the assistance of the beaux and the ladies.

The king had completed his toilet at nine o'clock; he appeared in an open carriage decorated with branches of trees and flowers. The queens had taken their seats upon a magnificent daïs, or platform, erected upon the borders of the lake, in a theatre of wonderful elegance of construction. In the space of five hours the carpenters had put together all the different parts connected with the theatre; the upholsterers had laid down the carpets and erected the seats; and as if at the signal of an enchanter's wand, a thousand arms, aiding instead of interfering with one another, had constructed the building on this spot to the sound of music; while at the same time other workmen illuminated the theatre and the shores of the lake with an incalculable number of tapers. As the heavens, set with stars, were perfectly unclouded, as not even a breath of air could be heard in the woods,—as if Nature herself had yielded complacently to the king's fancies,—the back of the theatre had been left open; so that, behind the foreground of the scenes, could be seen as a background the beautiful sky glittering with stars, the sheet of water on fire with the lights which were reflected in it, and the bluish outline of the grand masses of woods with their rounded tops. When the king made his appearance, the whole theatre was full, and presented to the view one vast group, dazzling with gold and precious stones, in which at the first glance no one single face could be distinguished. By degrees, as the eye became accustomed to so much splendour, the rarest beauties appeared to the view, as in the evening sky the stars appear one by one to him who closes his eyes and then opens them again.

The theatre represented a grove of trees: several fawns, lifting up their cloven feet, were leaping about here and there; a dryad appeared on the scene, and enticed them to pursuit of her; others gathered round her for her defence, and they quarrelled as they danced. Suddenly, to restore peace and order, Spring, accompanied by his whole court, made his appearance. The Elements, the subaltern powers of mythology, together with their attributes, crowded in the footsteps of their gracious sovereign. The Seasons, the allies of Spring, came to his side to form a quadrille, which after many words of more or less flattering import was the beginning of the dance. The

music of hautboys, flutes, and viols was descriptive of rural delights.

The king had already entered upon the scene amid thunders of applause. He was dressed in a tunic of flowers, which set off his easy and well-formed figure to advantage. His legs, the best-shaped at the court, were also displayed to great advantage in flesh-coloured silken hose, of silk so fine and so transparent that it seemed almost like flesh itself. The most beautiful pale-lilac satin shoes, with bows of flowers and leaves, confined his small feet. The bust of the figure was in harmonious keeping with the base. Beautiful waving hair; a fresh complexion, enhanced by the brilliancy of beautiful blue eyes, which softly kindled all hearts; a mouth with tempting lips, which deigned to open in smiles,—such was the prince of the period, who had that evening been justly named "The King of all the Loves." There was something in his carriage which resembled the buoyant majesty of an immortal; he did not dance,—he soared. His entrance had produced, therefore, the most brilliant effect. Suddenly the Comte de Saint-Aignan was observed endeavouring to approach either the king or Madame. The princess—who was clothed in a long dress, diaphanous and light as the finest network tissue from the hands of the skilful Mechlin workers, her knee occasionally revealed beneath the folds of the tunic, and her dainty feet encased in silken shoes—advanced, radiant with beauty, accompanied by her *cortége* of Bacchantes, and had already reached the spot which had been assigned to her in the dance. The applause continued so long that the count had ample leisure to join the king, who was standing still. "What is the matter, De Saint-Aignan?" said Spring.

"*Mon Dieu!* Sire," replied the courtier, as pale as death; "but your Majesty has not thought of the Fruits."—"Yes; it is suppressed."—"Far from it, Sire; your Majesty having given no directions about it, the musicians have retained it."—"How excessively annoying!" murmured the king. "This figure cannot be performed, since M. de Guiche is absent. It must be suppressed."

"Oh, Sire, a quarter of an hour's music without any dancing will produce an effect so chilling as to ruin the success of the ballet."—"But, Count, then—"—"Oh, Sire, that is not the greatest misfortune; for, after all, the orchestra could still just as well cut it out, if it were necessary; but—"—"But what?"—"Why M. de Guiche is here."

"Here?" replied the king, frowning,—"here? Are you

sure?"—"Yes, Sire; and ready-dressed for the ballet." The king felt the colour rise to his face, and said, "You are probably mistaken."—"So little is that the case, Sire, that if your Majesty will look to the right, you will see that the count is waiting." Louis turned hastily towards that side; and in fact, on the right, brilliant in his character of Autumn, De Guiche was waiting until the king should look at him, in order that he might address him. To describe the stupefaction of the king, and that of Monsieur, who was moving about restlessly in his box: to describe also the whisperings and the oscillation of the heads in the theatre, and the strange emotion of Madame at the sight of her partner,—is a task we must leave to abler hands.

The king stood almost gaping with astonishment as he looked at the count, who bowing lowly approached with the profoundest respect. "Sire," he said, "your Majesty's most humble servant comes to perform a service on this occasion, as he has done on the day of battle. Your Majesty, in omitting the dance of the Fruits, would be losing the most beautiful scene in the ballet. I did not wish to be the cause of so great a prejudice to your Majesty's elegance, skill, and graceful address; and I have left my tenants in order to offer my services to my prince."

Every word fell distinctly, in perfect harmony and eloquence, upon Louis XIV.'s ears. Their flattery pleased, as much as De Guiche's courage had astonished him, and he contented himself with replying, "I did not tell you to return, Count."—"Certainly not, Sire; but your Majesty did not tell me to remain."

The king perceived that time was passing away, that if the scene were prolonged it might complicate everything, and that a single cloud upon the picture would irredeemably spoil the whole. Besides, the king's heart suggested some bright ideas; he had just derived fresh inspiration from the eloquent glances of Madame. Henrietta's look had said to him, "Since they are jealous of you, divide their suspicions, for the man who distrusts two rivals does not distrust either in particular;" so that Madame by this clever diversion decided him. The king smiled upon De Guiche, who did not comprehend a word of Madame's dumb language, but only remarked that she pretended not to look at him; and he attributed the pardon which had been conferred upon him to the princess's kindness of heart.

The king seemed pleased with every one present. Monsieur alone could not understand. The ballet began; it was magnificent. When the music by its bursts of melody carried away

these illustrious dancers; when the simple, untutored pantomime of that period, far more naïve on account of the very indifferent acting of the august actors, had reached its culminating point of triumph,—the theatre almost fell with the tumultuous applause. De Guiche shone like a sun, but like a courtly sun which is contented to fill a subordinate part. Disdainful of a success of which Madame showed no acknowledgement, he thought of nothing but of boldly regaining the marked preference of the princess. She, however, did not bestow a single glance upon him. By degrees all his happiness, all his brilliancy, subsided into grief and anxiety; so that his limbs lost their power, his arms hung heavily by his side, and his head seemed stupefied. The king, who had from this moment become in reality the principal dancer in the quadrille, cast a side glance upon his vanquished rival. De Guiche ceased to sustain even the character of the courtier; without applause, he danced indifferently, and very soon could not dance at all. The triumph of the king and of Madame was assured.

CHAPTER CXIV

THE NYMPHS OF THE PARK OF FONTAINEBLEAU

The king remained for a moment to enjoy his triumph, which we have said was as complete as it could possibly be. He then turned towards Madame, for the purpose of admiring her also a little. Young persons love with more vivacity, perhaps with greater ardour and deeper passion, than others of a riper age, but all the other feelings are at the same time active in proportion to their youth and vigour; so that vanity being with them almost always the equivalent of love, the latter feeling, according to the laws of equipoise, never attains that degree of perfection which it acquires in men and women from thirty to five-and-thirty years of age. Louis thought of Madame, but only after he had carefully thought of himself; and Madame carefully thought of herself, without perhaps bestowing a single thought upon the king. The victim, however, amid all this royal love and vanity was De Guiche. Every one could observe the agitation and the prostration of the poor gentleman,—a prostration which was, indeed, the more remarkable since people were not accustomed to see him with his arms hanging listlessly by his side, his head heavy, and his eyes with their bright

intelligence gone. It rarely happened that any uneasiness was excited on his account, whenever a question of elegance or taste was under discussion, and De Guiche's defeat was accordingly attributed by the greater number present to his courtier-like tact and ability. But there were others—keen-sighted observers are always to be met with at court—who remarked his paleness and his listlessness, which he could neither feign nor conceal; and they concluded, with reason, that De Guiche was not acting the part of a flatterer. All these sufferings, successes, and comments were blended, confounded, and lost in the uproar of applause.

When, however, the queens had expressed their satisfaction and the spectators their enthusiasm, when the king had retired to his dressing-room to change his costume, and while Monsieur —dressed as a woman, as he delighted to be—was, in his turn, dancing about, De Guiche, who had now recovered himself, approached Madame, who, seated at the back of the theatre, was waiting for the second part, and had created a solitude for herself in the midst of the crowd, to meditate as it were beforehand upon chorographic effects; and it will be perfectly understood that, absorbed in this deep meditation, she did not see, or rather she pretended not to see, anything that was going on around her. De Guiche, then, observing that she was alone, near a thicket constructed of painted cloth, approached her. Two of her maids of honour, dressed as hamadryads, seeing De Guiche advance, drew back out of respect, whereupon De Guiche proceeded towards the middle of the circle and saluted her royal highness; but whether she did or did not observe his salutation, her royal highness did not even turn her head. A cold shiver passed through the unhappy man; he was unprepared for so utter an indifference, for he had neither seen nor been told of anything that had taken place, and consequently could guess nothing. Remarking, therefore, that his obeisance obtained him no acknowledgment, he advanced one step farther, and in a voice which he tried, though uselessly, to render calm, he said, "I have the honour to present my most humble respects to your royal Highness." Upon this Madame deigned to turn her eyes languidly towards the count, observing, "Ah! M. de Guiche, is that you? Good-day!" and she turned away again.

The count's patience almost forsook him, as he continued, "Your royal Highness danced just now most enchantingly."—"Do you think so?" replied Madame, with indifference.

"Yes; the character which your royal Highness assumed

is in perfect harmony with your own." Madame again turned round, and looking De Guiche full in the face with a bright and steady gaze, said, "Why so?"—"Oh, there can be no doubt of it!"—"Explain yourself!"—"You represent a divinity, beautiful, disdainful, and inconstant," said he.

"You mean Pomona, Monsieur the Count?"—"I allude to the goddess your royal Highness represents." Madame remained silent for a moment with her lips compressed, and then observed, "But, Monsieur, you, too, are an excellent dancer."—"Nay, Madame; I am only one of those who are never noticed, or who are soon forgotten if they ever happen to be noticed." And with this remark, accompanied by one of those deep sighs which affect the remotest fibres of one's being, his heart burdened with sorrow and throbbing fast, his head on fire, and his gaze wandering, he bowed breathlessly and withdrew behind the cloth thicket.

The only reply Madame condescended to make was by slightly raising her shoulders; and since her ladies of honour had, as has been said, discreetly remained apart while the conversation lasted, she recalled them by a look. The ladies were Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais. Both, at this signal from Madame, hastened to approach. "Did you hear, Mesdemoiselles, what M. le Comte de Guiche said?" the princess inquired.

"No."—"It really is very singular," she continued in a compassionate tone, "how exile has affected poor M. de Guiche's wit;" and then in a louder voice, fearful lest her unhappy victim might lose a syllable, she said, "In the first place he danced badly, and then afterwards his remarks were very silly." She then rose, humming the air to which she was presently going to dance. De Guiche had overheard everything. The arrow had pierced his heart and wounded him mortally. Then, at the risk of interrupting the progress of the *fête* by his ill-humour, he fled from the scene, tearing his beautiful costume of Autumn in pieces, and scattering, as he went along, the branches of vines, mulberry and almond trees, and all the other artificial attributes of his divinity. A quarter of an hour afterwards he had returned to the theatre; but it will be readily believed that it was only a powerful effort of reason over his distraction that had enabled him to recover; or perhaps—for the heart is so constituted—he found it impossible even to remain much longer separated from the presence of one who had broken his heart.

Madame was finishing her figure. She saw, but did not look

at him; and he, irritated and furious, turned his back upon her as she passed him, escorted by her nymphs and followed by a hundred flatterers. During this time, at the other end of the theatre, near the lake, a young woman was seated with her eyes fixed upon one of the windows of the theatre, from which were issuing streams of light,—the window in question being that of the royal box. As De Guiche left the theatre for the purpose of getting into the fresh air he so much needed, he passed close to this lady and saluted her. When she on her part perceived the young man, she rose like a woman surprised in the midst of ideas she was desirous of concealing even from herself. De Guiche stopped as he recognised her, and said hurriedly, "Good-evening, Mademoiselle de la Vallière; I am indeed fortunate in meeting you."—"I also, Monsieur the Count, am glad of this accidental meeting," said the young girl, as she was about to withdraw.

"Pray do not leave me," said De Guiche, stretching out his hand towards her, "for you would thus be contradicting the kind words you have just pronounced. Remain, I implore you! The evening is most lovely; you wish to escape from this tumult, and prefer your own society. Well, I can understand it; all women who are possessed of any feeling do, and you never find them dull or lonely when removed from the giddy vortex of these exciting amusements. Oh, Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle!"

"What is the matter, Monsieur the Count?" inquired La Vallière, in some alarm; "you seem agitated."—"I?—oh, no!"—"Then will you allow me, M. de Guiche, to return you the thanks I had proposed to offer you on the very first opportunity. It is to your recommendation, I am aware, that I owe my admission among the number of Madame's maids of honour."—"Indeed! Ah! I remember now, and I congratulate myself, Mademoiselle. Do you love any one?"—"I!" exclaimed La Vallière.

"Forgive me! I hardly know what I am saying; a thousand times forgive me! Madame was right, quite right,—this brutal exile has completely turned my brain."—"And yet it seemed to me that the king received you with kindness, Monsieur the Count."—"Do you think so? Received me with kindness—perhaps so—yes—"—"There cannot be a doubt that he received you kindly, for in fact you have returned without his permission."—"Quite true, and I believe you are right, Mademoiselle. But have you not seen M. de Bragelonne here?" La Vallière started at that name. "Why do you ask?" she inquired.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* have I offended you again?" said De Guiche. "In that case I am indeed unhappy, and greatly to be pitied."—"Yes, very unhappy, and very much to be pitied, M. de Guiche; for you seem to be suffering terribly."—"Oh, Mademoiselle, why have I not a devoted sister or a true friend?"—"You have friends, M. de Guiche; and M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne, of whom you spoke just now, is, I believe, one of them."—"Yes, yes, you are right; he is one of my best friends. Adieu, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, adieu;" and he fled like one possessed along the shore of the lake. His dark shadow glided, lengthening as it disappeared, among the blazing pyramids of lamps and the glittering undulations of the water. La Vallière looked after him compassionately for some time, saying, "Yes, yes; he, too, is suffering, and I begin to understand why."

La Vallière had hardly finished when her companions, Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, ran forward. They were released from their attendance, and had changed their costumes of nymphs. Delighted with the beautiful night and the success of the evening, they returned to look after their companion. "What! already here?" they said to her. "We thought we should be the first at the rendezvous."—"I have been here this quarter of an hour," replied La Vallière.—"Did not the dancing amuse you?"—"No."—"But surely, the whole spectacle?"—"No more than the dancing. So far as a spectacle is concerned, I much prefer that which these dark woods present, in whose depths can be seen, now in one direction and again in another, a light passing by,—as though it were an eye bright red in colour, sometimes open, at others closed."

"La Vallière is quite a poet," said Tonnay-Charente.—"In other words," said Montalais, "she is insupportable. Whenever there is a question of laughing a little or of amusing ourselves with anything, La Vallière begins to cry; whenever we girls have reason to cry, because perhaps we have mislaid our dresses, or because our vanity has been wounded, or our costume fails to produce any effect, La Vallière laughs."—"Oh! for my part, that is not my character," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. "I am a woman, and there are few like me. Whoever loves me, flatters me; whoever flatters me, pleases me by his flattery; and whoever pleases me—" — "Well," said Montalais, "you do not finish."—"It is too difficult," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, laughing loudly; "do you, who are so clever, finish for me."

"And you, Louise?" said Montalais,—"does any one please you?"—"That is a matter which concerns no one but myself," replied the young girl, rising from the mossy bank on which she had been reclining during the whole time the ballet had lasted. "Now, Mesdemoiselles, we have agreed to amuse ourselves to-night without any one to overlook us and without any escort. We are three in number, we like one another, and the night is lovely. Look yonder! do you not see the moon slowly rising in the heavens, silvering the topmost branches of the chestnuts and the oaks? Oh, beautiful walk! dear liberty! the beautiful soft turf of the woods, the happiness which your friendship confers upon me! Let us walk arm-in-arm towards those large trees. Out yonder all are at this moment seated at table and fully occupied, or preparing to adorn themselves for a set and formal promenade; horses are being saddled or harnessed to the carriages,—the queen's mules or Madame's four white ponies. As for ourselves, let us quickly reach some retired spot where no eye can see us and no step follow ours. Do you not remember, Montalais, the woods of Chaverny and of Chambord, the numberless poplars of Blois, where we exchanged many of our mutual hopes?"

"And many confidences also?"—"Yes."—"Well," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "I also think a good deal, but I take care—"—"To say nothing," said Montalais; "so that when Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente thinks, Athenaïs is the only one who knows it."

"Hush!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de la Vallière; "I hear steps approaching from this side."—"Quick, quick, then, among the high reed-grass!" said Montalais. "Stoop, Athenaïs; you are so tall!"

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente stooped as she was told; and almost at the same moment they saw two gentlemen approaching, their heads bent down, walking arm-in-arm on the fine gravel walk running parallel with the bank. The young girls had indeed made themselves small, for nothing was to be seen of them. "It is M. de Guiche," whispered Montalais in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's ear.—"It is M. de Bragelonne," whispered the latter in La Vallière's ear.

The two young men approached still closer, conversing in animated voices. "She was here just now," said the count. "If I had only seen her, I should have declared it to be an apparition; but I spoke to her."—"You are positive, then?"—"Yes; but perhaps, too, I frightened her."—"In what way?"

—"Oh, *mon Dieu!* I was still half mad at you know what; so that she could hardly have understood what I was saying, and must have become alarmed."

"Oh," said Bragelonne, "do not make yourself uneasy, my friend! She is all kindness, and will excuse you; she is clear-sighted, and will understand."—"Yes; but if she should have understood, and understood too well, she may talk."—"You do not know Louise, Count," said Raoul. "Louise possesses every virtue, and has not a single fault." The two young men passed on; and as they proceeded their voices were soon lost in the distance.

"How is it, La Vallière," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne spoke of you as Louise?"—"We were brought up together," replied Mademoiselle de la Vallière; "we were children when we first knew each other."—"And then, M. de Bragelonne is your *fiancé;* every one knows that."—"Oh, no! I did not know it. Is that so, Mademoiselle?"

"That is to say," replied Louise, blushing, "M. de Bragelonne has honoured me by asking my hand in marriage; but—"—"Well?"—"It seems the king will not consent to the marriage."—"Eh? Why the king? and what has the king to do with it?" exclaimed Aure, sharply. "Good gracious! has the king the right to interfere in matters of that kind? Politics are politics, as M. de Mazarin used to say; but love is love. If, therefore, you love M. de Bragelonne and he love you, marry him; I give my consent."

Athenaïs began to laugh. "Oh! I speak seriously," replied Montalais, "and my opinion in this case is quite as good as the king's, I suppose; is it not, Louise?"—"Come," said La Vallière, "these gentlemen have passed; let us profit by our being alone to cross the open ground and so take refuge in the woods."—"So much the better," said Athenaïs; "because I see the torches setting out from the château and the theatre, which seem as if they were preceding some persons of distinction,"

"Let us run, then," said all three; and gracefully lifting up the long folds of their silk dresses, they ran lightly across the open space between the lake and the thickest covert of the park. Montalais, agile as a deer, and Athenaïs, eager as a young wolf, bounded through the dry grass; and now and then some bold Actæon might by the aid of the faint light have perceived their chaste and well-formed limbs somewhat displayed beneath the heavy folds of their satin petticoats. La Vallière, more

refined and more bashful, allowed her dress to flow around her; retarded also by her lameness, it was not long before she called out to her companions to halt, and, left behind, she obliged them both to wait for her. At this moment a man concealed in a dry ditch full of young willow saplings scrambled quickly up its shelving side, and ran off in the direction of the château.

The three young girls, for their part, reached the outskirts of the park, every path of which they well knew. The ditches were bordered by high hedges full of flowers, which on that side protected the foot-passengers from being intruded upon by the horses and carriages. In fact, the sound of Madame's and of the queen's carriages could be heard rolling in the distance upon the hard, dry ground of the roads. Many cavaliers followed, with the sound so well imitated by the rhythmic line of Virgil. Distant music was heard in response; and when the harmony died away, the nightingale, with his song full of pride, poured forth his melodious chants and his most complicated, learned, and sweet compositions to those who he perceived had met beneath the thick shade of the woods. Near the songster, in the dark background of the great trees, could be seen the glistening eyes of an owl attracted by the harmony. In this way the *fête* for the whole court was a *fête* also for the mysterious inhabitants of the forest; for certainly the deer from the brake, the pheasant on the branch, the fox in its hole, were all listening. One could realise the life led by all this nocturnal and invisible population from the restless movements which suddenly took place among the leaves. Then our sylvan nymphs would utter a slight cry; but reassured immediately afterwards, they would laugh and resume their walk.

In this manner they reached the royal oak,—the venerable relic of an oak which in its youth had listened to the sighs of Henry II. for the beautiful Diana of Poitiers, and later still to those of Henry IV. for the lovely Gabrielle d'Estrées. Beneath this oak the gardeners had piled up the moss and turf in such a manner that never had a seat more luxurious offered repose to the wearied limbs of any monarch. The trunk of the tree, somewhat rough to recline against, was sufficiently large to accommodate the three young girls, whose voices were lost among the branches, which stretched downwards towards the trunk.

CHAPTER CXV

WHAT WAS SAID UNDER THE ROYAL OAK

THE softness of the air, the stillness of the foliage, tacitly imposed upon these young girls the need of changing immediately their trifling conversation for one of a more serious character. She, indeed, whose disposition was the most lively, —namely, Montalais,—was the first to yield to its influence; and she began by heaving a deep sigh, and saying, "What happiness to feel ourselves here alone and at liberty, with every right to be frank, especially towards each other!"—"Yes," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for the court, however brilliant it may be, has always some falsehood concealed beneath the folds of its velvet robes or beneath the blaze of its diamonds."—"I," replied La Vallière,—"I never tell a falsehood; when I cannot speak the truth, I remain silent."

"You will not remain long in favour, my dear," said Montalais. "It is not here as it was at Blois, where we told the Dowager Madame all our little annoyances and all our longings. There were certain days when Madame remembered that she herself had been young, and on those days whoever talked with her found in her a sincere friend. She related to us her flirtations with Monsieur, and we told her of the flirtations she had had with others, or at least the rumours of them which had been spread abroad. Poor woman, so simple-minded! she laughed at them, as we did. Where is she now?"—"Ah, Montalais, laughter-loving Montalais!" cried La Vallière; "you see that you are sighing again. The woods inspire you, and you are almost reasonable this evening."—"Mesdemoiselles," said Athenaïs, "you ought not to regret the court at Blois so much, unless you do not feel happy with us. A court is a place where men and women resort to talk of matters which mothers, guardians, and especially confessors so severely denounce. At court they talk of such things by the indulgence of the king and the queens; is not that pleasant?"—"Oh, Athenaïs!" said Louise, blushing.

"Athenaïs is frank to-night," said Montalais; "let us avail ourselves of it."—"Yes, let us take advantage of it; for this evening I could divulge the dearest secrets of my heart."—"Ah, if M. de Montespan were here!" said Montalais.—"Do

you think that I care for M. de Montespan?" murmured the beautiful young girl.

"He is handsome, I believe?"—"Yes; and that is no small advantage in my eyes."—"There now, you see—"—"I will go further, and say that, of all the men whom one sees here, he is the handsomest and the most—"—"What was that?" said La Vallière, starting suddenly from the mossy bank.

"A deer which is hurrying through the branches."—"I am only afraid of men," said Athenaïs.

"When they do not resemble M. de Montespan."—"A truce to this raillery! M. de Montespan is attentive to me, but that does not commit me in any way. Is not M. de Guiche here,—he who is so devoted to Madame?"—"Poor fellow!" said La Vallière.

"Why poor? Madame is sufficiently beautiful, and of sufficiently high rank, I suppose?" La Vallière shook her head sorrowfully, saying, "When one loves, it is neither beauty nor rank; my dear friends, when one loves, it should be the heart, or the eyes only, of him or of her who is loved." Montalais began to laugh loudly. "Heart, eyes!" she said; "oh, sugar-plums!"

"I speak for myself," replied La Vallière.—"Noble sentiments," said Athenaïs, with an air of protection, but with indifference. "Are they not your own, Mademoiselle?" said Louise.

"Perfectly so; but, to continue, how can one pity a man who bestows his attentions upon such a woman as Madame? If any disproportion exists, it is on the count's side."—"Oh, no, no!" returned La Vallière; "it is on Madame's side."—"Explain yourself."—"I will. Madame has not even a wish to know what love is. She diverts herself with the feeling, as children do with fireworks, of which a spark might set a palace on fire. It makes a display, and that is all she cares about. Besides, pleasure and love form the tissue of which she wishes her life to be woven. M. de Guiche will love this illustrious lady, but she will never love him."

Athenaïs laughed disdainfully. "Do people really love?" she said. "Where are the noble sentiments which you just now uttered? Does not a woman's virtue consist in the courageous refusal of every intrigue which might compromise her? A properly regulated woman, endowed with a generous heart, ought to look at men, make herself loved, adored even, by them, and say, at the very utmost, once in her life, 'I begin to think

that I ought not to have been what I am; I should have detested this one less than others.' "—"Therefore," exclaimed La Vallière, clasping her hands, "that is what M. de Montespan has to expect."—"Certainly,—he as well as every one else. What! have I not said that I admit he possesses a certain superiority, and would not that be enough? My dear, a woman is a queen during the whole period in which Nature permits her to enjoy sovereign power,—from fifteen to thirty-five years of age. After that, we are free to have a heart, when we have only that left."—"Oh, oh!" murmured La Vallière.

"Excellent!" cried Montalais; "a wife and mistress combined in one! Athenaïs, you will make your way in the world." —"Do you not approve of what I say?"—"Completely," replied her laughing companion.

"You are not serious, Montalais?" said Louise.—"Yes, yes; I approve everything Athenaïs has just said; only—"—"Only what?"—"Well, I cannot carry it out. I have the firmest principles; I form resolutions beside which the laws of the Stadtholder and of the King of Spain are child's play; but when the moment arrives to put them into execution, nothing comes of them."—"Your courage fails," said Athenaïs, scornfully.

"Miserably."—"Unfortunate nature!" returned Athenaïs. "But at least you make a choice."—"Why, no, really. It pleases fate to disappoint me in everything: I dream of emperors, and I find only—"—"Aure, Aure!" exclaimed La Vallière, "for pity's sake, do not, for the pleasure of saying something witty, sacrifice those who love you with such devoted affection."

"Oh, I do not trouble myself much about that! Those who love me are sufficiently happy that I do not dismiss them altogether, my dear. So much the worse for myself if I have a weakness for any one; but so much the worse for others if I revenge myself upon them for it,—and upon my word so I do." —"You are right," said Athenaïs, "and perhaps you, too, will reach the same goal; in other words, Mesdemoiselles, that is termed being a coquette. Men, who are very silly in most things, are particularly so in confounding, under the term coquetry, a woman's pride and her varying moods. I, for instance, am proud,—that is to say, impregnable; I treat my admirers harshly, but without any pretension to retain them. Men call me a coquette, because they are vain enough to think that I care for them. Other women—Montalais, for instance—

have allowed themselves to be influenced by flattery; they would be lost were it not for that most fortunate principle of instinct which urges them to change suddenly, and punish the man whose devotion they so recently accepted."

"A very learned dissertation," said Montalais, in the tone of thorough enjoyment.—"It is odious!" murmured Louise.

"Thanks to this sort of coquetry,—for indeed that is genuine coquetry," continued Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente,—"the lover who a little while since was puffed up with pride, a minute later is suffering at every pore of his vanity and self-esteem. He was already beginning to assume the airs of a conqueror, but now he recedes; he was about to assume an air of protection towards us, but he is obliged to prostrate himself anew. The result of all which is that instead of having a husband who is jealous and troublesome and too familiar, we have a lover always trembling in our presence, always longing, and always submissive; and for this simple reason,—that he finds the same woman never the same. Be convinced, Mesdemoiselles, therefore, of the advantages of coquetry. Possessing that, one reigns a queen among women in cases where Providence has withheld that precious faculty of holding one's heart and mind in check."—"Oh, how clever you are," said Montalais, "and how well you understand the duty women owe themselves!"—"I am only settling a case of individual happiness," said Athenaïs, modestly, "and defending myself, like all weak, loving dispositions, against the oppression of the stronger."

"La Vallière does not say a word."—"Does she not approve of what we are saying?"—"Nay! only I do not understand it," said Louise. "You talk like those who would not be called upon to live in this world of ours."—"And very pretty your world is," said Montalais.

"A world," returned Athenaïs, "in which men worship a woman to make her fall in her bewilderment, and insult her when she has fallen."—"Who spoke to you of falling?" said Louise.

"Yours is a new theory, then, my dear. Will you tell us how you intend to resist yielding to temptation, if you allow yourself to be hurried away by love?"—"Oh!" exclaimed the young girl, raising towards the dark heavens her beautiful eyes filled with tears, "if you did but know what a heart was, I would explain, and would convince you! A loving heart is stronger than all your coquetry, and more powerful than all your pride. A woman is never truly loved, I believe, and God

is my witness; a man never loves with idolatry, except he feel himself loved in return. Let old men, whom we read of in comedies, fancy themselves adored by coquettes. A young man is conscious of it, and does not delude himself; if he has a fancy or a strong desire or an absorbing passion for a coquette, —you see I give a free field and a broad one,—in a word, a coquette may drive him out of his senses, but will never make him fall in love. Love, such as I conceive it to be, is an incessant, complete, and perfect sacrifice; but it is not the sacrifice of one only of the two persons who are united. It is the perfect abnegation of two souls who are desirous of blending into one. If I ever love, I shall implore my lover to leave me free and pure. I will tell him—what he will understand—that my heart is torn by my refusal: and he in his love for me, aware of the magnitude of my sacrifice,—he in his turn, I say, will show his devotion for me, will respect me, and will not seek my ruin, or insult me when I shall have fallen, as you said just now, when uttering your blasphemies against love such as I understand it. That is my idea of love. And now you will tell me, perhaps, that my lover will despise me. I defy him to do so, unless he be the vilest of men: and my heart assures me that it is not such a man I should choose. A look from me will repay him for the sacrifices he makes, or it will inspire him with virtues which he would never think he possessed."

"But, Louise," exclaimed Montalais, "you tell us this, and do not carry it into practice."—"What do you mean?"—"You are adored by Raoul de Bragelonne, who worships you on both his knees. The poor fellow is made the victim of your virtue, just as he would be—nay, more than he would be, even —of my coquetry or of Athenaïs's pride."—"This is simply a different shade of coquetry," said Athenaïs; "and Mademoiselle, I perceive, is a coquette without knowing it."—"Oh!" said La Vallière.

"Yes, you may call it instinct, if you please, keenest sensibility, exquisite refinement of feeling, perpetual display of outbursts of passion which end in nothing. Oh, it is very artful too, and very effective! I should even, now that I reflect upon it, have preferred this system of tactics to my own pride, for waging war with men, because it offers the advantage sometimes of thoroughly convincing them; but at the present moment, without utterly condemning myself, I declare it to be superior to the simple coquetry of Montalais;" and the two young girls began to laugh. La Vallière alone preserved silence, and quietly

shook her head. Then, a moment after, she added, "If you were to tell me in the presence of a man but a fourth part of what you have just said, or even if I were assured that you think it, I should die of shame and grief upon this spot."

"Very well, die, poor tender little darling!" replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for if there are no men here, there are at least two women, your own friends, who declare you to be attainted and convicted of being a coquette from instinct, a born coquette,—in other words, the most dangerous kind of coquette which exists in the world."—"Oh, Mesdemoiselles," replied La Vallière, blushing, and almost ready to weep. Her two companions again burst out laughing.

"Very well! I shall ask Bragelonne for information."—"Bragelonne?" said Athenaïs.

"Yes! that great fellow who is as courageous as Cæsar and as clever and witty as M. Fouquet; that poor fellow who for twelve years has known you, loved you, and yet—one can hardly believe it—has never even kissed the tips of your fingers."—"Explain to us this cruelty,—you who are all heart," said Athenaïs to La Vallière.

"I will explain it by a single word,—virtue. You will perhaps deny the existence of virtue?"—"Come, Louise, tell us the truth," said Aure, taking her by the hand.—"But what do you wish me to tell you?" cried La Vallière.

"Whatever you like; but it will be useless for you to say anything, for I persist in my opinion of you,—a coquette from instinct, a born coquette; in other words, as I have already said, and I say it again, the most dangerous of all coquettes!"—"Oh, no, no! for pity's sake, do not believe that!"—"What! twelve years of extreme severity?"—"Why, twelve years ago I was only five years old! The freedom of the child cannot, surely, be added to the young girl's account."—"Well, you are now seventeen,—three years instead of twelve. During those three years you have remained constantly and unchangeably cruel. Against you are arrayed the silent shades of Blois, the meetings when you diligently conned the stars together, the evening wanderings beneath the plane-trees, his impassioned twenty years speaking to your fourteen years, the fire of his glances addressed to yourself."

"Yes, yes; but so it is!"—"Nonsense! impossible!"—"But, *mon Dieu!* why impossible?"—"Tell us something credible, my dear, and we will believe you."—"Yet if you were

to suppose one thing—"—"What is that?"—"Out with it, or we shall suppose much more than you like!"

"Suppose, then, that I thought I was in love, and that I am not."—"What! not in love?"—"If I have acted in a different manner from that of others when they are in love, it is because I do not love, and because my hour has not yet come."—"Louise, Louise," said Montalais, "take care, or I shall remind you of the remark you made just now! Raoul is not here; do not overwhelm him while he is absent. Be charitable; and if on closer inspection you think you do not love him, tell him so, poor fellow!" and she began to laugh.

"Louise pitied M. de Guiche just now," said Athenaïs; "would it be possible to detect the explanation of the indifference for the one in this compassion for the other?"—"Say what you please, Mesdemoiselles," said La Vallière, sadly; "upbraid me as you like, since you do not understand me."—"Oh, oh!" replied Montalais; "temper, sorrow, and tears! We are laughing, Louise, and are not, I assure you, quite the monsters you suppose. Look at the proud Athenaïs, as she is called: she does not love M. de Montespan, it is true; but she would be in despair if M. de Montespan were not to love her. Look at me: I laugh at M. Malicorne, but the poor fellow whom I laugh at knows very well when he may be permitted to press his lips upon my hand. And yet the eldest of us is not twenty yet. What a future for us!"—"Silly, silly girls!" murmured Louise.

"You are quite right," said Montalais; "and you alone have spoken words of wisdom."—"Certainly."—"I do not dispute it," replied Athenaïs. "And so you positively do not love poor M. de Bragelonne?"—"Perhaps she does," said Montalais; "she is not yet quite sure of it. But in any case listen, Athenaïs: if M. de Bragelonne becomes free, I will give you a little friendly advice."—"What is that?"—"To look at him well before you decide in favour of M. de Montespan."

"Oh! in that way of considering the subject, my dear, M. de Bragelonne is not the only person whom one could look at with pleasure. M. de Guiche, for instance, has his value also."—"He did not distinguish himself this evening," said Montalais, "and I know from very good authority that Madame thought him unbearable."—"But M. de Saint-Aignan produced a most brilliant effect, and I am sure that more than one person who saw him dance this evening will not soon forget him. Do you not think so, La Vallière?"

"Why do you ask me? I did not see him, nor do I know him."—"What! you did not see M. de Saint-Aignan, you do not know him?"—"No."—"Come, come! do not affect a virtue more extravagantly excessive than our boldness! You have eyes, I suppose?"—"Excellent."—"Then you must have seen all those who danced this evening."—"Yes, nearly all."—"That is a very impertinent 'nearly all' for some."—"You must take it for what it is worth."

"Very well; now, among all those gentlemen whom you 'nearly all' saw, which do you prefer?"—"Yes," said Montalais; "is it M. de Saint-Aignan, or M. de Guiche, or M. —"—"I prefer no one. I thought them all about the same."—"Do you mean, then, that among all that brilliant assembly—the first court in the world—no one pleased you?"

"I do not say that."—"Tell us, then, who your ideal is."—"It is not an ideal being."—"He exists, then?"—"In very truth, Mesdemoiselles," exclaimed La Vallière, aroused and excited, "I cannot understand you at all! What! you who have a heart as I have, eyes as I have, and yet you speak of M. de Guiche and of M. de Saint-Aignan when the king was there!"

These words, uttered so precipitately and in an agitated, fervid voice, made her two companions between whom she was seated exclaim together, in a manner which terrified her, "The king!" La Vallière buried her face in her hands. "Yes," she murmured, "the king! the king! Have you ever seen any one to be compared to the king?"

"You were right just now in saying you had excellent eyes, Mademoiselle; for you see a great distance,—too far, indeed. Alas! the king is not one upon whom our poor eyes have a right to be fixed."—"That is too true!" cried La Vallière. "It is not the privilege of all eyes to gaze upon the sun; but I will look upon him, even were I to be blinded in doing so."

At this moment, and as though caused by the words which had just escaped La Vallière's lips, a rustling of leaves and of that which sounded like some silken material was heard behind the adjoining bush. The young girls hastily rose, almost terrified out of their senses. They distinctly saw the leaves move, but could not tell what it was that stirred them.

"It is a wolf, or a wild boar!" cried Montalais; "fly! Mesdemoiselles, fly!" The three girls, a prey to unspeakable terror, fled by the first path which presented itself, and did not stop until they had reached the verge of the wood. There, breathless,

leaning against one another, feeling one another's hearts throb wildly, they endeavoured to collect their senses, but could only succeed in doing so after the lapse of some minutes. Perceiving at last the lights from the windows of the château, they decided to walk towards them. La Vallière was exhausted with fatigue, and Aure and Athenaïs were obliged to support her.

"Oh, we have escaped well!" said Montalais.—"Mesdemoiselles," said La Vallière, "I am greatly afraid that it was something worse than a wolf. For my part, and I speak as I think, I should have preferred to run the risk of being devoured alive by some wild animal than to be listened to and overheard. Fool, fool, that I am! How could I have thought, how could I have said such things!" and saying this, her head bowed like a reed; she felt her limbs fail, and, all her strength abandoning her, she glided almost inanimate from the arms of her companions, and sank down upon the grass.

CHAPTER CXVI

THE KING'S UNEASINESS

Let us leave poor La Vallière, half fainting in the arms of her two companions, and return to the neighbourhood of the royal oak. The three young girls had hardly run twenty paces, when the sound which had so much alarmed them was renewed among the branches. A man's figure might indistinctly be perceived, and putting the branches of the bushes aside he appeared upon the verge of the wood, and perceiving that the place was empty burst out into a peal of laughter. It is useless to say that the form in question was that of a young and handsome man, who made a sign to another, who thereupon made his appearance. "Well, Sire," said the second figure, advancing timidly, "has your Majesty put our young sentimentalists to flight?"—"It seems so," said the king, "and you can show yourself without fear, Saint-Aignan."—"But, Sire, take care! you will be recognised."—"But I tell you they have gone."—"This is a most fortunate meeting, Sire; and if I dared offer an opinion to your Majesty, we ought to follow them."—"They are far away by this time."

"Bah! they would easily allow themselves to be overtaken, especially if they knew who were following them."—"What do you mean by that, Monsieur coxcomb?"—"Why, one of them

seems to have taken a fancy to me, and another compared you to the sun."—"The greater reason why we should not show ourselves, Saint-Aignan. The sun does not show himself in the night-time."

"Upon my word, Sire, your Majesty seems to have very little curiosity. In your place, I should like to know who are the two nymphs, the two dryads, the two hamadryads, who have so good an opinion of us."—"Oh, I shall know them again very well, I assure you, without running after them."—"By what means?"—"By their voices, of course. They belong to the court, and the one who spoke of me had a very sweet voice."

"Ah! your Majesty permits yourself to be influenced by flattery."—"No one will ever say it is a means you make use of."—"Forgive my stupidity, Sire!"—"Come; let us go and look where I told you."—"Is the passion, then, which your Majesty confided to me already forgotten?"—"Oh, no, indeed! How is it possible to forget such beautiful eyes as those of Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yet the other had so sweet a voice."—"Which one?"—"She who has fallen in love with the sun."—"M. de Saint-Aignan!"—"Forgive me, Sire."—"Well, I am not sorry you should believe me to be an admirer of sweet voices as well as of beautiful eyes. I know you to be a terrible talker, and to-morrow I shall have to pay for the confidence I have shown you."—"What do you mean, Sire?"—"I mean that to-morrow every one will know that I have designs upon this little Vallière; but be careful, Saint-Aignan! I have confided my secret to no one but you; and if any one should speak to me about it, I shall know who has betrayed my secret."

"You are angry, Sire!"—"No; but you understand that I do not wish to compromise the poor girl."—"Do not be afraid, Sire."—"You promise me, then?"—"Sire, I give you my word of honour."

"Excellent," thought the king, laughing to himself; "now every one will know to-morrow that I have been running about after La Vallière to-night." Then, endeavouring to see where he was, he said, "Why, we have lost ourselves."—"Not quite so bad as that."—"Where does that gate lead?"—"To Rond-Point, Sire."—"Where we were going when we heard the sound of women's voices?"

"Yes, Sire, and the termination of a conversation in which I had the honour of hearing my own name pronounced by the side of your Majesty's."—"You return to that subject very

frequently, Saint-Aignan."—"Your Majesty will forgive me, but I am delighted to know that a woman exists whose thoughts are occupied about me without my knowledge and without my having done anything to deserve it. Your Majesty cannot comprehend this satisfaction, for your rank and merit attract attention and compel regard."—"No, no, Saint-Aignan, believe me or not, as you like," said the king, leaning familiarly upon De Saint-Aignan's arm, and taking the path which he thought ought to lead him to the château; "but this candid confession, this perfectly disinterested preference of a woman who will perhaps never attract my attention,—in one word, the mystery of this adventure excites me; and the truth is that if I were not so taken up with La Vallière—"

"Do not let that interfere with your Majesty's intentions; you have time enough before you."—"What do you mean?"—"La Vallière is said to be very strict in her ideas."—"You excite my curiosity, De Saint-Aignan, and I am anxious to find her again. Come, let us walk on." The king spoke untruly,—for nothing, on the contrary, troubled him less; but he had a part to play, and so he walked on hurriedly.

De Saint-Aignan followed him at a short distance. Suddenly the king stopped; the courtier followed his example. "Saint-Aignan," he said, "do you not hear some one moaning? Listen!"—"Yes; and crying, too, it seems."—"It is in this direction," said the king, pointing.

"It sounds like the tears and sobs of a woman," said M. de Saint-Aignan. —"Let us run!" and the king and the favourite, following a by-path, ran across the grass. As they gradually approached, the cries were more distinctly heard.

"Help! help!" exclaimed two voices. The young men redoubled their speed; and as they approached nearer, the sobs they had heard were changed into cries. "Help! help!" was again repeated; at the sound of which the king and his companion increased the rapidity of their pace. Suddenly, at the other side of a ditch, under the drooping branches of a willow, they perceived a woman on her knees, holding another in her arms, who seemed to have fainted. A few paces from them, a third, standing in the middle of the path, was calling for assistance. Perceiving two gentlemen, whose rank she could not tell, her cries for assistance were redoubled. The king, who was in advance of his companion, leaped across the ditch, and reached the group at the very moment when from the end of the path which led to the château a dozen persons were approaching,

who had been drawn to the spot by the same cries which had attracted the king and M. de Saint-Aignan. "What is the matter, Mesdemoiselles?" inquired Louis.

"The king!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montalais, in her astonishment failing to support La Vallière's head; so that the latter fell full length upon the ground. "Yes, it is the king; but that is no reason why you should abandon your companion. Who is she?"—"It is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Sire."—"Mademoiselle de la Vallière!"—"Yes, Sire; she has just fainted."—"Poor child!" said the king. "Quick, quick! fetch a surgeon!"

But however great the anxiety with which the king had pronounced these words, he had not so carefully watched over himself that they did not appear, as well as the gesture which accompanied them, somewhat cold to M. de Saint-Aignan, to whom the king had confided the great love with which she had inspired him. "Saint-Aignan," continued the king, "watch over Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I beg. Send for a surgeon. I will hasten forward and inform Madame of the accident which has befallen one of her maids of honour;" and in fact, while M. de Saint-Aignan was busily engaged in making preparations for carrying Mademoiselle de la Vallière to the château, the king hurried forward, happy to have an opportunity of approaching Madame, and of speaking to her under some plausible pretext. Fortunately, a carriage was passing. The coachman was told to stop; and the persons who were inside, having been informed of the accident, eagerly gave up their seats to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The current of fresh air produced by the rapid motion of the carriage soon recalled the invalid to her senses. Having reached the château, she was able, though very weak, to alight from the carriage and, with the assistance of Athenaïs and Montalais, to reach the inner apartments. They made her sit down in a room adjoining the drawing-rooms on the ground floor. After a while, as the accident had not produced much effect upon the promenaders, the promenade was resumed. During this time the king had found Madame beneath a tree, and had seated himself by her side; and his foot gently sought that of the princess beneath her chair. "Take care, Sire!" said Henrietta to him, in a low tone; "you do not show yourself as indifferent as you should be."—"Alas!" replied Louis XIV., in the same tone, "I much fear that we have entered into an agreement above our strength to keep." He then added aloud, "You have heard of the accident, I suppose?"—"What acci-

dent?"—"Oh! in seeing you I forgot that I had come expressly to tell you of it. I am, however, painfully affected by it. One of your maids of honour, poor Mademoiselle de la Vallière, has just fainted."

"Indeed! poor girl!" said the princess, quietly; "what was the cause of it?" She then added in an undertone, "You forget, Sire, that you wish others to believe in your passion for this girl, and yet you remain here while she is almost dying, perhaps, elsewhere."—"Ah, Madame," said the king, sighing, "how much more perfect you are in your part than I am, and how well you think of everything!" He then rose, saying loud enough for every one to hear him, "Permit me to leave you, Madame; my uneasiness is very great, and I wish to be quite certain myself that proper attention has been paid." The king left to return again to La Vallière; while all those who had been present commented upon the king's remark, "My uneasiness is very great."

CHAPTER CXVII

THE KING'S SECRET

On his way Louis met the Comte de Saint-Aignan. "Well, Saint-Aignan," he inquired, with affected interest, "how is the invalid?"—"Really, Sire," stammered De Saint-Aignan, "to my shame, I confess I do not know."—"What! you do not know?" said the king, pretending to take in a serious manner this want of attention to the object of his predilection.

"Will your Majesty pardon me? but I have just met one of our three loquacious wood-nymphs, and I confess that my attention has been taken away from other matters."—"Ah!" said the king, eagerly, "you have found, then—"—"The one who deigned to speak of me in such advantageous terms; and having found mine, I was searching for yours, Sire, when I had the happiness to meet your Majesty."—"Very well; but Mademoiselle de la Vallière before everything else," said the king, faithful to his part.

"Oh, our charming invalid!" said De Saint-Aignan; "how fortunately her fainting came on, since your Majesty had already occupied yourself about her!"—"What is the name of your fair lady, Saint-Aignan? Is it a secret?"—"Sire, it ought to be a secret, and a very great one, even; but your Majesty is well

aware that no secret can possibly exist for you."—"Well, what is her name?"—"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Is she pretty?"—"Exceedingly so, Sire; and I recognised the voice which pronounced my name in such tender accents. I then accosted her, questioned her as well as I was able to do, in the midst of the crowd; and she told me, without suspecting anything, that a little while ago she was under the great oak, with her two friends, when the appearance of a wolf or a robber had terrified them, and made them run away."

"But," inquired the king, eagerly, "what are the names of these two friends?"—"Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, "will your Majesty send me forthwith to the Bastille?"—"What for?"—"Because I am an egotist and a fool. My surprise was so great at such a conquest and at so fortunate a discovery that I went no further in my inquiries. Besides, I did not think that your Majesty would attach any very great importance to what you heard, preoccupied as you were with Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and then Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente left me suddenly, to return to Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Let us hope, then, that I shall be as fortunate as yourself. Come, Saint-Aignan!"—"Your Majesty is ambitious, I perceive, and does not wish to allow any conquest to escape you. I assure you that I will conscientiously set about my inquiries; and, moreover, from one of the three Graces we shall learn the names of the others, and by the name the secret."—"I, too," said the king, "only require to hear her voice to know it again. Come, let us say no more about it, but show me where poor La Vallière is."

"Well," thought De Saint-Aignan, "the king's regard is beginning to display itself, and for that girl too! It is extraordinary; I should never have believed it." With this thought passing in his mind, he showed the king the room where La Vallière had been taken. The king entered, followed by De Saint-Aignan. In a low room, near a large window looking out upon the gardens, La Vallière, reclining in a large arm-chair, inhaled in deep draughts the balmy evening breeze. From the loosened body of her dress the lace fell in tumbled folds, mingling with the tresses of her beautiful fair hair, which lay scattered upon her shoulders. Her languishing eyes were filled with tears, though their fire was not wholly extinguished; she seemed as lifeless as those beautiful visions of our dreams, pale and romantic, which pass before the closed eyes of the sleeper, half opening their wings without moving them, unclosing their lips

without a sound escaping them. The pearl-like pallor of La Vallière possessed a charm which it would be impossible to describe. Mental and bodily suffering had produced upon her features a soft and noble expression of grief; from the perfect passiveness of her arms and bust, she resembled one whose soul had passed away more than a living being,—she seemed not to hear either the whisperings of her companions or the distant murmurs which arose from the neighbourhood. She seemed to be communing within herself; and her beautiful, slender, and delicate hands trembled from time to time, as though from the contact of some invisible touch.

La Vallière was so completely absorbed in her reverie, that the king entered without her perceiving him. At a distance he gazed upon her lovely face, upon which the moon shed its pure silvery light. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, with a terror which he could not control; "she is dead."—"No, Sire," said Montalais, in a low voice; "on the contrary, she is better. Are you not better, Louise?" But Louise did not answer. "Louise," continued Montalais, "the king has deigned to express his anxiety concerning your health."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise, starting up abruptly, as if a stream of fire had darted through her frame to her heart; "the king uneasy about my health!"—"Yes," said Montalais.—"The king is here, then?" said La Vallière, not venturing to look round her.

"That voice! that voice!" whispered Louis, eagerly, to De Saint-Aignan.—"Yes, it is so," replied De Saint-Aignan. "Your Majesty is right; it is she who declared her love for the sun."

"Hush!" said the king. And then approaching La Vallière, he said, "You are not well, Mademoiselle? Just now, indeed, in the park, I saw that you had fainted. How were you attacked?"—"Sire," stammered the poor child, pale and trembling, "I cannot tell."—"You have been walking too much," said the king; "and fatigue, perhaps—"—"No, Sire," said Montalais, eagerly, answering for her friend, "it could not be from fatigue, for we passed part of the evening seated under the royal oak."

"Under the royal oak?" returned the king, starting. "I was not deceived,—it is as I thought;" and he directed a look of intelligence at the count.—"Yes," said De Saint-Aignan, "under the royal oak, with Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."—"How do you know that?" inquired Montalais.

"In a very simple way. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente told me so."—"In that case she must have told you the cause

of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's fainting?"—"Why, yes; she told me something about a wolf or a robber,—I forget precisely which." La Vallière listened, her eyes fixed, her bosom heaving, as if, gifted with more than ordinary acuteness of perception, she divined a portion of the truth.

Louis imagined this attitude and agitation to be the consequences of a terror but partially removed. "Nay, fear nothing, Mademoiselle," he said, with a rising emotion which he could not conceal; "the wolf which terrified you so much was simply a wolf with two legs."—"It was a man!" screamed Louise; "it was a man who was listening?"

"Suppose it were, Mademoiselle, what great evil was there in his having listened? Is it likely that even in your own opinion you would have said anything which should not have been listened to?" La Vallière wrung her hands, and hid her face in them, as if to hide her blushes. "In Heaven's name," she said, "who was concealed there,—who was listening?" The king advanced towards her, to take hold of one of her hands. "It was I, Mademoiselle," he said, bowing with tender respect. "Could I frighten you?"

La Vallière uttered a loud cry; for the second time her strength forsook her, and cold, moaning, and in utter despair, she again fell apparently lifeless in her chair. The king had just time to hold out his arm, so that she was partially supported by him. Mesdemoiselles de Tonnay-Charente and de Montalais, who stood a few paces from the king and La Vallière, motionless and almost petrified at the recollection of their conversation with La Vallière, did not think even of offering their assistance to her, feeling restrained by the presence of the king, who with one knee on the ground held La Vallière round the waist with his arm.

"You heard, Sire?" murmured Athenaïs. But the king did not reply; he had his eyes fixed upon La Vallière's half-closed eyes, and held her drooping hand in his own. "Of course," replied De Saint-Aignan, who on his side, hoping that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente would faint, advanced towards her, holding his arms extended,—"of course; we did not even lose a word." But the haughty Athenaïs was not a woman to faint so easily; she darted a terrible look at De Saint-Aignan and fled. Montalais, with more courage, advanced hurriedly towards Louise, and received her from the king's hands, who was already fast losing his presence of mind, as he felt his face covered by the perfumed tresses of the seemingly dying girl.

"Excellent!" said De Saint-Aignan. "This is indeed an adventure; and it will be my own fault if I am not the first to relate it."

The king approached him, and with a trembling voice and a passionate gesture said, "Not a syllable, Count!" The poor king forgot that only an hour before he had given the same man a similar recommendation, but with the very opposite intention,—namely, that the man should be indiscreet. But the latter recommendation was quite as unnecessary as the former. Half an hour afterwards all Fontainebleau knew that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had had a conversation under the royal oak with Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, and that in this conversation she had confessed her love for the king. It was known, also, that the king, after having manifested the uneasiness with which the state of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's health had inspired him, had turned pale and trembled very much as he received the beautiful girl fainting in his arms; so that it was quite agreed among the courtiers that the greatest event of the period had just transpired,—that his Majesty loved Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and that consequently Monsieur could now sleep in perfect tranquillity. It was this, even, that the queen-mother, as surprised as the others by this sudden change, hastened to tell the young queen and Philip of Orléans. Only she set to work in a different manner, by attacking these two interested persons in the following way. To her daughter-in-law she said: "See now, Thérèse, how very wrong you were to accuse the king! Here they say he has given himself to-day a new mistress; why should there be any greater truth in the report of to-day than in that of yesterday, or in that of yesterday than in that of to-day?" To Monsieur, in relating to him the adventure of the royal oak, she said: "Are you not very absurd in your jealousies, my dear Philip? It is asserted that the king has lost his head over that little La Vallière. Say nothing of it to your wife; the queen would know it immediately."

This latter confidential communication had its natural result. Monsieur, who had regained his composure, went triumphantly to look after his wife; and as it was not yet midnight, and the *fête* was to continue until two in the morning, he offered her his hand for a promenade. At the end of a few paces, however, the first thing he did was to disobey his mother. "Do not go and tell any one, the queen least of all," he said mysteriously, "what people say about the king."—"What do they say about him?" inquired Madame.

"That my brother has suddenly been smitten with a strange passion."—"For whom?"—"For that little La Vallière." As it was dark, Madame could smile at her ease. "Ah!" she said, "and how long is it since this has been the case?"—"For some days, so it seems. But that was nothing but smoke, and it is only this evening that the flames of his passion have been revealed."—"The king shows his good taste," said Madame, "and in my opinion she is a very charming girl."

"I verily believe you are jesting, my dear."—"I! In what way?"—"In any case this passion will make some one very happy, even if it be only La Vallière herself."—"Really," continued the princess, "you speak, Monsieur, as if you had read into the inmost recesses of my maid-of-honour's heart. Who has told you that she agrees to return the king's affection?"—"And who has told you that she will not return it?"

"She loves the Vicomte de Bragelonne."—"You think so."—"She is even affianced to him."—"She was so."—"What do you mean?"—"Why, when they went to ask the king's permission to arrange the marriage, he refused his permission."—"Refused?"—"Yes, even to the Comte de la Fère himself, whom the king honours, you know, with the greatest regard, on account of the part he took in your brother's restoration, and in other events, also, which happened a long time ago."—"Well, the poor lovers must wait until the king is pleased to change his opinion; they are young, and there is time enough."

"But, my love," said Philip, laughing, "I perceive that you do not know the best part of the affair."—"No!"—"That by which the king was most deeply touched."—"The king, do you say, has been deeply touched?"—"To the very heart."—"But how,—in what manner? Tell me directly."

"By an adventure the romance of which cannot be surpassed."—"You know how I love such adventures, and yet you keep me waiting," said the princess, impatiently.—"Well, then—" and Monsieur paused.—"I am listening."

"Under the royal oak,—you know where the royal oak is?"—"What can that matter? Under the royal oak, you were saying—"—"Well, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, fancying herself alone with her two friends, revealed to them her passion for the king."—"Ah!" said Madame, beginning to be uneasy, "her passion for the king?"—"Yes."—"When was this?"—"About an hour ago."

Madame started, and then said, "And no one knew of this passion?"—"No one."—"Not even his Majesty?"—"Not

even his Majesty. The little creature kept her secret most strictly to herself, when suddenly it proved stronger than herself, and so escaped her."—"And from whom did you get this absurd tale?"—"Why, as everybody else did, from La Vallière herself, who confessed her love to Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were her companions."

Madame stopped, and by a hasty movement dropped her husband's hand. "Did you say it was an hour ago she made this confession?" Madame inquired.

"About that time."—"Is the king aware of it?"—"Why, that is the very thing which constitutes the romance of the affair, for the king was behind the royal oak with De Saint-Aignan, and he heard the whole of the interesting conversation without losing a single word of it."

Madame felt struck to the heart, saying incautiously, "But I have seen the king since, and he never told me a word about it."—"Of course," said Monsieur, bluntly, as a triumphant husband, "he took care not to speak of it to you himself, since he recommended every one not to say a word about it to you."—"What do you mean?" said Madame, irritated.

"I mean that they wished to keep you in ignorance of the affair altogether."—"But why should they wish to conceal it from me?"—"From the fear that your friendship for the young queen might induce you to say something about it to her; that is all."

Madame hung down her head; her feelings were grievously wounded. She could not enjoy a moment's repose until she had met the king. As a king is, most naturally, the very last person in his kingdom who knows what is said about him, in the same way that a lover is the only one who is kept in ignorance of what is said about his mistress; so, when the king perceived Madame, who was looking for him, he approached her somewhat disturbed, but still gracious and attentive in his manner. Madame waited for him to speak about La Vallière first; but as he did not speak of her, she inquired, "And the poor girl?"—"What poor girl?" said the king.

"La Vallière. Did you not tell me, Sire, that she had fainted?"—"She is still very ill," said the king, affecting the greatest indifference.

"But surely that will prejudicially affect the rumour you were going to spread, Sire?"—"What rumour?"—"That your attention was taken up by her."—"Oh," replied the king, carelessly, "I trust it will be reported all the same." Madame

still waited. She wished to know if the king would speak to her of the adventure of the royal oak; but the king did not say a word about it. Madame, on her side, did not open her lips about the adventure; so that the king took leave of her without having reposed the slightest confidence in her. Hardly had she seen the king move away, when she set out in search of De Saint-Aignan. De Saint-Aignan was never very difficult to find; he was like the smaller vessels which always follow in the wake of the larger ships, and as tenders to them.

De Saint-Aignan was the very man whom Madame needed in her state of mind at that moment; and as for him, he only looked for worthier ears than others he had found, to have an opportunity of recounting the event with all its details, and therefore he did not spare Madame a single word of the whole affair. When he had finished, Madame said to him, "Confess, now, that it is all a charming invention."—"Invention,—no; a true story,—yes."—"Confess, whether invention or true story, that it was told to you as you have told it to me, but that you were not there."—"Upon my honour, Madame, I was there."

"And you think that these confessions may have made an impression upon the king?"—"Certainly, as those of Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente did upon me," replied De Saint-Aignan. "Do not forget, Madame, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière compared the king to the sun; that was flattering enough."—"The king does not permit himself to be influenced by such flatteries."

"Madame, the king is just as much man as sun; and I saw that plainly enough just now when La Vallière fell into his arms."—"La Vallière fell into the king's arms!"—"Oh, it was the most graceful picture possible! Just imagine! La Vallière had fallen back fainting, and—"—"Well, what did you see? Tell me,—speak!"—"I saw, what ten other people saw at the same time,—I saw that when La Vallière fell into his arms, the king himself almost fainted." Madame uttered a subdued cry, the only indication of her smothered anger. "Thank you," she said, laughing in a convulsive manner; "you relate stories delightfully, M. de Saint-Aignan;" and she hurried away, alone and almost suffocated by her feelings, towards the château.

CHAPTER CXVIII

EVENING STROLLS

MONSIEUR had taken leave of the princess in the best possible humour, and feeling much fatigued by the day's events had retired to his apartments, leaving every one to finish the night as he chose. When in his room, Monsieur began to dress for the night with a careful attention, which displayed itself from time to time in fits of satisfaction. While his attendants were engaged in dressing him, he sang the principal airs of the ballet which the violins had played, and to which the king had danced. He then summoned his tailors, inspected his costumes for the next day, and in token of his extreme satisfaction distributed various presents among them. When the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had seen the prince return to the château, also came in, Monsieur overwhelmed him with kindness. The former, after having saluted the prince, remained silent for a moment, like a sharpshooter who deliberates before deciding in what direction he will renew his fire; then, seeming to make up his mind, he said, "Have you remarked a very singular circumstance, Monseigneur?"—"No; what is it?"—"The bad reception which his Majesty in appearance gave the Comte de Guiche."—"In appearance?"—"Yes, certainly, since in reality he has restored him to favour."—"I did not notice it," said the prince.

"What! did you not see that instead of ordering him to return to his exile, as would have been natural, he encouraged him in his strange opposition by permitting him to resume his place in the ballet?"—"And you think that the king was wrong, Chevalier?" asked Monsieur.

"Are not you of my opinion, Prince?"—"Not altogether so, my dear Chevalier; and I think the king was quite right not to have flown into a rage against a poor fellow more foolish than evil-disposed."—"Really," said the chevalier, "so far as I am concerned, I confess that this magnanimity astonishes me in the highest degree."—"Why so?" inquired Philip.

"Because I should have thought that the king would have been more jealous," replied the chevalier, spitefully. During the last few minutes Monsieur had felt that there was something of an irritating nature concealed under his favourite's remarks; this last word, however, had ignited the powder. "Jealous!" exclaimed the prince,—"jealous! What do you mean by that

remark? Jealous of what, if you please,—or jealous of whom?" The chevalier perceived that he had allowed one of those mischievous remarks to escape him to which he sometimes gave utterance. He endeavoured, therefore, to recall it while it was still possible to do so. "Jealous of his authority," he said, with an assumed frankness; "of what else would you have the king be jealous?"—"Ah!" said Monseigneur, "that's very proper."

"Did your royal Highness," continued the chevalier, "solicit dear De Guiche's pardon?"—"No, indeed," said Monsieur. "Guiche is a clever fellow, and full of courage; but as I do not approve of his conduct with Madame, I wish him neither harm nor good."

The chevalier had assumed a bitterness with regard to De Guiche, as he had attempted to do with the king; but he thought that he perceived that the time for indulgence and even for the utmost indifference had arrived, and that in order to throw some light on the question it might be necessary for him to put the lamp, as the saying is, under the husband's very nose. In this game one sometimes burns others, but often gets burned himself. "Very well, very well," said the chevalier to himself, "I shall wait for De Wardes. He will do more in one day than I in a month; for I believe—God forgive me, or rather him—that he is still more jealous than I am. Then, again, it is not De Wardes even whom I require, so much as that some event should happen; and in the whole of this affair I see none. That De Guiche returned after he had been sent away is certainly serious enough, but all its seriousness disappears when I consider that De Guiche has returned at the very moment when Madame troubles herself no longer about him. Madame, in fact, is occupied with the king; that is clear. But besides that I cannot and do not want to meddle with the king, Madame cannot be much longer occupied with the king, if, as is asserted, the king has ceased to occupy himself about her. The gist of the whole matter is that we must remain perfectly quiet, and await the arrival of some new caprice, and let that decide the whole affair." The chevalier thereupon settled himself resignedly in the arm-chair in which Monsieur permitted him to seat himself in his presence; and having no more spiteful or malicious remarks to make, the chevalier's wit seemed to have deserted him. Most fortunately Monsieur was endowed with great good-humour, as has been already stated, and he had enough for two, until the time arrived for dismissing his servants and gentlemen of the chamber, and he then passed into his

sleeping apartment. As he withdrew, he desired the chevalier to present his compliments to Madame, and say that as the night was cool, and as he was afraid of the toothache, he would not venture out again into the park during the remainder of the evening.

The chevalier entered the princess's apartments at the very moment when she herself entered them. He acquitted himself faithfully of the commission which had been intrusted to him, and in the first place remarked the indifference and annoyance even with which Madame received her husband's communication,—a circumstance which appeared to him fraught with something quite fresh. If Madame had been about to leave her apartments with that strangeness of manner about her, he would have followed her; but Madame was returning to them. There was nothing to be done. Therefore he turned upon his heel like an unemployed heron; seemed to question earth, air, and water about it; shook his head, and walked away mechanically in the direction of the gardens. He had hardly gone a hundred paces when he met two young men, walking arm-in-arm, with their heads bent down, and idly kicking the small stones out of their path as they walked on, plunged in thought. It was De Guiche and Bragelonne, the sight of whom, as it always did, produced upon the Chevalier de Lorraine instinctively a feeling of great repugnance. He did not, however, the less on that account salute them with a very low bow, which they returned with interest. Then, observing that the park was becoming deserted, that the illuminations were beginning to burn out, and that the morning breeze was springing up, he turned to the left and entered the château again by one of the smaller courtyards. The others turned aside to the right, and continued on their way towards the large park. As the chevalier was ascending the side staircase which led to the private entrance, he saw a woman, followed by another, make her appearance under the arcade which led from the small to the large courtyard. The two women walked so fast that the rustling of their silk dresses betrayed them in the darkness of the night. The style of their mantles, their graceful figures, a mysterious yet haughty carriage which distinguished them both, especially the one who walked first, struck the chevalier. "I certainly know those two ladies," said he to himself, pausing upon the top step of the small staircase. Then, as with the instinct of a bloodhound he was about to follow them, one of his servants who had been running after him arrested his attention.

"Monsieur," he said, "the courier has arrived."—"Very well," said the chevalier, "there is time enough; to-morrow will do."—"There are some urgent letters which Monsieur the Chevalier would be glad to see, perhaps."—"Ah!" inquired the chevalier, "where from?"—"One from England, and the other from Calais; the latter arrived by express, and seems of great importance."

"From Calais! Who the deuce writes to me from Calais?"—"I think I can recognise the handwriting of your friend M. le Comte de Wardes."—"Oh!" cried the chevalier, forgetting his intention of acting the spy, "in that case I will come up at once." This he did, while the two unknown ladies disappeared at the end of the court opposite to the one by which they had just entered.

We shall now follow them, and leave the chevalier undisturbed to his correspondence. When they had arrived at the grove of trees, the foremost of the two halted, somewhat out of breath, and cautiously raising her hood said, "Are we still far from the tree?"—"Yes, Madame, more than five hundred paces. But pray rest awhile; you will not be able to walk much longer at this pace."—"You are right," said the princess,—for it was she; and she leaned against a tree. "And now, Mademoiselle," she resumed, after having recovered her breath, "tell me the whole truth, and conceal nothing from me."

"Oh, Madame," said the young girl, in an agitated voice, "you are already angry with me."—"No, my dear Athenaïs; reassure yourself! I am in no way angry with you. After all, these things do not concern me personally. You are anxious about what you may have said under the oak, you are afraid of having offended the king; and I wish to tranquillise you by ascertaining myself if it were possible that you could have been overheard."—"Oh, yes, Madame; the king was so close to us."—"Still, you were not speaking so loud that some of your remarks may not have been lost."—"We thought that we were quite alone, Madame."

"There were three of you, you say?"—"Yes; La Vallière, Montalais, and myself."—"And you, individually, spoke in a light manner of the king?"—"I am afraid so. Should such be the case, your Highness will have the kindness to make my peace with his Majesty, will you not, Madame?"—"If there should be any occasion for it, I promise you to do so. However, as I have already told you, it will be better not to anticipate evil, and to be quite sure first that evil has been committed. The

night is now very dark, and the darkness is still greater under those large trees. It is not likely that you were recognised by the king. To inform him of it, by being the first to speak, is to denounce yourself."

"Oh, Madame, Madame! if Mademoiselle de la Vallière were recognised, I must have been recognised also. Besides, M. de Saint-Aignan did not leave me a doubt on that subject."—"Did you, then, say anything very disrespectful of the king?"—"Not at all, Madame. It was one of the others who made some very flattering remarks about the king; and my remarks may have been much in contrast with hers."—"That Montalais is such a giddy girl," said Madame.—"Oh, it was not Montalais! Montalais said nothing; it was La Vallière."

Madame started as if she had not known it perfectly already. "No, no," she said; "the king cannot have heard. Besides, we will now try the experiment for which we came out. Show me the oak. Do you know where it is?" she continued.—"Alas, Madame, yes."—"And you can find it again?"—"I could find it with my eyes shut."—"That is very well, then. You will sit down on the bank where you were, where La Vallière was, and speak in the same tone and to the same effect as you did before. I will conceal myself in the thicket; and if I can hear you, I will tell you so."—"Yes, Madame."

"If, therefore, you really spoke sufficiently loud for the king to have heard you, in that case—" Athenaïs seemed to wait the conclusion of the phrase with some anxiety. "In that case," said Madame, in a stifled voice, arising doubtless from her hurried progress,—"in that case, I forbid you—" And Madame again increased her pace. Suddenly, however, she stopped. "An idea occurs to me," she said.—"A good idea, no doubt, Madame," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.

"Montalais must be as much embarrassed as La Vallière and yourself."—"Less so; for she is less compromised, having said less."—"That does not matter; she will help you, I dare say, by deviating a little from the exact truth."—"Especially if she knows that your Highness is kind enough to interest yourself about me."—"Very well; I think I have discovered what we want, my dear."—"How delightful!"

"You will say that all three of you were perfectly well aware of the presence of the king behind that tree or behind that thicket, whichever it might have been; and that you knew M. de Saint-Aignan was there too."—"Yes, Madame."—"For you cannot disguise it from yourself, Athenaïs, that Saint-

Aignan takes advantage of some very flattering remarks which you made about him."—"Well, Madame, you see very well that one can be overheard," cried Athenaïs, "since M. de Saint-Aignan overheard us."

Madame bit her lips, for she had thoughtlessly committed herself. "Oh, you know Saint-Aignan's character very well," she said; "the favour the king shows him almost turns his brain, and he talks at random,—not only that, he very often invents. Besides, that is not the question; the fact remains, Did or did not the king overhear?"—"Oh, yes, Madame, he did hear," said Athenaïs, in despair.

"In that case do what I said: maintain boldly that all three of you knew,—mind, all three of you; for if there is a doubt about any one of you, there will be a doubt about all,—persist. I say, that you all three were aware of the presence of the king and of M. de Saint-Aignan, and that you wished to amuse yourselves at the expense of those who were listening."—"Oh, Madame, at the king's expense; we never dare say that!"

"It is a simple jest; an innocent deception readily permitted in young girls, whom men wish to take by surprise. In this manner everything is explained. What Montalais said of Malicorne, a mere jest; what you said of M. de Saint-Aignan, a mere jest too; and what La Vallière might have said of—"—"And which she would have given anything to have recalled."—"Are you sure of that?"—"Perfectly so."—"Very well; an additional reason, therefore. Say that the whole affair was a mere joke. M. de Malicorne will have no occasion to get out of temper; M. de Saint-Aignan will be completely put out of countenance,—he will be laughed at instead of you; and, lastly, the king will be punished for a curiosity which was unworthy of his rank. Let people laugh a little at the king in this affair, and I do not think he will complain of it."

"Oh, Madame, you are indeed an angel of goodness and sense."—"It is to my own advantage."—"In what way?"—"Do you ask me how it is to my advantage to spare my maids of honour remarks, annoyances, and perhaps even calumnies? Alas! you well know, my dear, that the court has no indulgence for this sort of peccadilloes. But we have now been walking for some time; shall we be long before we reach it?"—"About fifty or sixty paces farther; turn to the left, Madame, if you please."

"And so you are sure of Montalais?" said Madame.—"Oh,

certainly."—"Will she do what you ask her?"—"Everything. She will be delighted."

"As for La Vallière—" ventured the princess.—"Ah, there will be some difficulty with her, Madame; she would scorn to tell a falsehood."—"Yet when it is for her interest to do so—"—"I am afraid that that would not make the slightest difference in her ideas."

"Yes, yes," said Madame, "I have been already told that. She is one of those over-nice and affectedly particular persons, who place Heaven in the foreground to conceal themselves behind it. But if she refuse to tell a falsehood,—as she will expose herself to the jests of the whole court, as she will have annoyed the king by a confession as ridiculous as it was immodest—Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière will think it but proper that I should send her back again to her pigeons in the country, in order that in Touraine yonder or in Le Blaisois—I know not where it may be—she may at her ease study sentiment and pastoral simplicity together." These words were uttered with a vehemence and harshness which terrified Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; and the consequence was that so far as she was concerned, she promised to tell as many falsehoods as might be necessary. It was in this amiable frame of mind that Madame and her companion reached the neighbourhood of the royal oak. "Here we are," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.

"We shall soon learn if one can overhear," replied Madame.—"Hush!" said the young girl, holding Madame back with a hurried gesture, entirely forgetful of etiquette. Madame stopped. "You see that you can hear," said Athenaïs.

"How?"—"Listen!" Madame held her breath; and in fact the following words, pronounced by a gentle and melancholy voice, floated towards them: "I tell you, Viscount, I tell you I love her madly; I tell you I love her to distraction."

Madame started at the voice, and beneath her hood a bright joyous smile illumined her features. It was she who now stayed her companion; and with a light footstep leading her some twenty paces back, that is to say, out of the reach of the voice, she said: "Remain there, my dear Athenaïs, and let no one surprise us. I think it may be you about whom they are conversing."—"Me, Madame?"—"Yes, you; or rather your adventure. I will go and listen; if we were both there, we should be discovered. Go and fetch Montalais, and then return and wait for me with her at the entrance of the forest." And

then, as Athenaïs hesitated, the princess again said "Go!" in a voice which did not admit of reply. Athenaïs thereupon caught up her rustling skirts, and by a path which crossed the group of trees she regained the flower-garden. As for Madame, she concealed herself in the thicket, leaning her back against a gigantic chestnut-tree, one of the roots of which had been cut in such a manner as to form a seat, and waited there full of anxiety and apprehension. "Now," she said, "since one can hear from this place, let us listen to what M. de Bragelonne and that other madly-in-love fool, the Comte de Guiche, have to say about me."

CHAPTER CXIX

IN WHICH MADAME ACQUIRES A PROOF THAT LISTENERS CAN HEAR WHAT IS SAID

THERE was a moment's silence, as if all the mysterious sounds of night were hushed to listen, at the same time with Madame, to these youthful and passionate disclosures. It was Raoul's turn to speak. He leaned indolently against the trunk of the great oak, and replied in his sweet and musical voice, "Alas, my dear De Guiche, it is a great misfortune!"

"Yes," cried the latter, "great indeed!"—"You do not understand me, De Guiche. I say that it is a great misfortune for you,—not that of loving, but that of not knowing how to conceal your love."—"What do you mean?" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Yes, you do not perceive one thing; namely, that it is no longer to the only friend you have,—in other words, to a man who would rather die than betray you: you do not perceive, I say, that it is no longer to your only friend that you confide your passion, but you betray it to the first-comer."—"To the first-comer!" exclaimed De Guiche; "are you mad, Bragelonne, to say such a thing to me?"—"The fact is so, however."—"Impossible! How, in what manner, could I have become indiscreet to such an extent?"

"I mean, my friend, that your eyes, your manner, your sighs, speak, in spite of yourself; that every unbridled feeling leads and hurries a man beyond his own control. In such a case he ceases to be master of himself; he is a prey to a mad passion, which makes him confide his grief to the trees, to his horses, or to the air, from the very moment when he has no longer any

intelligent being within reach of his voice. Besides, my poor friend, remember this: it very rarely happens that there is not always some one present to hear, especially those very things which ought not to be heard." De Guiche uttered a deep sigh. "Nay," continued Bragelonne, "you distress me; since your return here you have a hundred times and in a hundred different ways confessed your love for her; and even, had you not said anything, your return would alone have been a terrible indiscretion. I persist, then, in drawing this conclusion,—that if you do not place a greater watch over yourself than you have hitherto done, one day or another something will happen which will cause an explosion. Who will save you then? Answer me! Who will save her?—for, innocent as she will be of your affection, your affection will be an accusation against her in the hands of her enemies."—"Alas!" murmured De Guiche; and a deep sigh accompanied the exclamation.

"That is not answering me, De Guiche."—"Yes, yes."—"Well, what reply have you to make?"—"This, my friend,—that when that day arrives, I shall not be less a living being than I feel myself to be now."—"I do not understand you."—"So many vicissitudes have worn me out. At present, I am no more a thinking, acting being; at present, the most worthless of men is better than I am; therefore my remaining strength is now exhausted, my latest-formed resolutions have vanished, and I abandon myself to my fate. When a man is out campaigning, as we have been together, and he sets off alone to reconnoitre, it sometimes happens that he meets with a party of five or six foragers, and although alone he defends himself; afterwards, five or six others arrive unexpectedly,—his anger is aroused and he persists; but if six, eight, or ten others come up, he either sets spurs to his horse, if he is still on horseback, or lets himself be slain to save an ignominious flight. Such, indeed, is my own case: first I had to struggle against myself; afterwards, against Buckingham; now, since the king is in the field, I will not contend against the king, nor even, I wish you to understand, should the king withdraw, against the nature of that woman. Still, I do not deceive myself! Having committed myself to the thraldom of that love, I will lose my life in it."

"It is not she whom you ought to reproach," replied Raoul; "it is yourself."—"Why so?"—"You know the princess's character,—somewhat giddy, easily captivated by novelty, susceptible to flattery, whether it come from a blind person or

a child,—and yet you allow your passion for her to eat your very life away. Look at her; love her, if you will,—for no one whose heart is not engaged elsewhere can see her without loving her,—yet while you love her, respect, in the first place, her husband's rank, then himself, and lastly your own safety."

"Thanks, Raoul."—"For what?"—"Because, seeing how much I suffer for this woman, you endeavour to console me,—because you tell me all the good of her you think, and perhaps even that which you do not think."—"Oh," said Raoul, "there you are wrong, De Guiche! What I think I do not always say; but in that case I say nothing. But when I speak, I know not either how to feign or to deceive; and whoever listens to me may believe me."

During this conversation Madame, her head stretched forward, with eager ear and dilated gaze endeavouring to penetrate the obscurity, thirstily drank in the faintest sound of their voices.

"Oh, I know her better than you do, then!" exclaimed De Guiche. "She is not giddy, but frivolous; she is not attracted by novelty,—she is utterly oblivious, and is without faith; she is not simply susceptible to flattery,—she is a practised and cruel coquette, a thorough coquette. Yes, yes, I am sure of it. Believe me, Bragelonne, I am suffering all the torments of hell. Brave, passionately fond of danger, I meet a danger greater than my strength and my courage; but, believe me, Raoul, I reserve for myself a victory which shall cost her floods of tears."

Raoul looked at his friend; and as the latter, almost breathless with emotion, threw back his head against the trunk of the oak, "A victory," he asked, "of what kind?"—"Of what kind, you ask?"—"Yes."—"One day I will accost her, and will address her thus: 'I was young, I was madly in love; I possessed, however, sufficient respect to throw myself at your feet, and to prostrate myself with my forehead buried in the dust, if your looks had not raised me to your hand. I fancied I understood your looks; I arose, and then, without having done anything towards you except love you yet more devotedly, if that were possible, you, a woman without heart, faith, or love, in very wantonness of disposition, dashed me down again from mere caprice. You are unworthy, princess of the royal blood though you may be, of the love of an honest man. I offer my life as a sacrifice for having loved you too tenderly, and I die hating you.'"

"Oh!" cried Raoul, terrified at the accents of profound sincerity which the young man's words betrayed, "I was right in saying you were mad, De Guiche."—"Yes, yes," exclaimed De Guiche, following out his own idea; "since there are no wars here now, I will flee yonder to the north, seek service in the Empire, where some Hungarian or Croat or Turk will kindly put me out of my misery at once."

De Guiche did not finish; or rather, as he finished, a sound made him start, and at the same moment made Raoul leap to his feet. As for De Guiche, buried in his own thoughts, he remained seated, with his head tightly pressed between his hands. The bushes were pushed aside, and a woman, pale and much agitated, appeared before the two young men. With one hand she held back the branches which would have struck her face, and with the other she raised the hood of the mantle which covered her shoulders. By her clear and lustrous glance, by her lofty carriage, by her haughty attitude, and still more than all by the throbbing of his own heart, De Guiche recognised Madame, and uttering a loud cry he removed his hands from his temples, and covered his eyes with them. Raoul, trembling and out of countenance, fumbled with his hat, and merely muttered a few formal words of respect. "M. de Bragelonne," said the princess, "have the goodness, I beg, to see if my attendants are not somewhere yonder, either in the walks or in the groves; and you, Monsieur the Count, remain here,—I am tired, and you will perhaps give me your arm."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of the unhappy young man, he would have been less terrified than by her cold and severe tone. However, as he himself had just said, he was brave; and as in the depths of his own heart he had just decisively made up his mind, De Guiche arose, and observing Bragelonne's hesitation turned towards him a glance full of resignation and of grateful acknowledgment. Instead of immediately answering Madame, he even advanced a step towards the viscount, and holding out towards him the hand which the princess had just desired him to give her, pressed the loyal hand of his friend in his own with a sigh, in which he seemed to give to friendship all the life that was left in the depths of his heart.

Madame, who in her pride had never known what it was to wait, now waited until this mute colloquy was ended. Her royal hand remained suspended in the air; and when Raoul had left, it sank without anger, but not without emotion, into

that of De Guiche. They were alone in the depths of the dark and silent forest, and nothing could be heard but Raoul's hastily retreating footsteps along the obscure paths. Over their heads was extended the thick and fragrant vault of branches, through the occasional openings of which the stars could be seen glittering. Madame softly drew De Guiche about a hundred paces away from that indiscreet tree which had heard and had allowed so many things to be heard during that evening; and leading him to a neighbouring glade, so that they could see a certain distance around them, she said in a trembling voice, "I have brought you here, because yonder, where we were, everything can be overheard."

"Everything can be overheard, did you say, Madame?" replied the young man, mechanically.—"Yes."—"Which means—" murmured De Guiche.

"Which means that I have heard every syllable you have said."—"Oh, Heaven! this only was wanting to destroy me," stammered De Guiche; and he hung down his head, like an exhausted swimmer beneath the wave which engulfs him.

"And so," Madame began, "you judge me as you have said?" De Guiche grew pale, turned his head aside, and was silent; he felt almost on the point of fainting. "I do not complain," continued the princess, in a tone of voice full of gentleness. "I prefer a frankness which wounds me, to flattery which would deceive me. And so, according to your opinion, M. de Guiche, I am a coquette and a worthless creature?"—"Worthless!" cried the young man,—"you worthless! Oh, most certainly I did not say, I could not have said, that that which was the most precious object in life for me could be worthless! No, no; I did not say that."

"A woman who sees a man perish, consumed by the fire she has kindled, and who does not allay that fire, is, in my opinion, a worthless woman."—"What can it matter to you what I said?" returned the count. "What am I, compared to you, and why should you even trouble yourself to know whether I exist or not?"—"M. de Guiche, both you and I are human beings; and knowing you as I do, I do not wish you to risk your life. With you I will change my conduct and character. I will be, not frank,—for I am always so,—but truthful. I implore you, therefore, Monsieur the Count, to love me no more, and to forget entirely that I have ever addressed a word or a glance to you."

De Guiche turned, bending a look full of passionate devotion

upon her. "You," he said,—"you excuse yourself! you implore me!"—"Certainly; since I have done the evil, I ought to repair the evil I have done. And so, Monsieur the Count, this is the agreement; you will forgive my frivolity and my coquetry—nay, do not interrupt me; I will forgive you for having said I was frivolous and a coquette, or something worse perhaps; and you will renounce your idea of dying, and will preserve for your family, for the king, and for our sex a cavalier whom every one esteems, and whom many hold dear." Madame pronounced this last word with such an accent of frankness and even of tenderness that the poor young man's heart seemed ready to burst. "Oh, Madame, Madame!" he stammered.

"Nay, listen further," she continued. "When you shall have renounced all thought of me for ever,—from necessity in the first place, and afterwards because you will yield to my entreaty,—then you will judge me more favourably, and I am convinced that you will replace this love (forgive the folly of the expression) by a sincere friendship, which you will be ready to offer me, and which I assure you shall be cordially accepted." De Guiche, his forehead bedewed with perspiration, a feeling of death in his heart, and a trembling agitation through his whole frame, bit his lip, stamped his foot on the ground, and, in a word, devoured the bitterness of his grief. "Madame," he said, "what you offer is impossible, and I cannot accept such conditions."

"What!" said Madame; "do you refuse my friendship?"—"No, no! I need not your friendship, Madame; I prefer to die from love than to live for friendship."—"Monsieur the Count!"—"Oh, Madame!" cried De Guiche, "I have come to that supreme moment in which no other consideration and no other duty exists than the consideration and duty of a man of honour towards the woman he worships. Drive me away, curse me, denounce me,—you will be perfectly right. I have uttered complaints against you, but I complained so bitterly because I love you; I have said that I would die, and die I shall. If I lived, you would forget me; but dead, you would never forget me, I am sure."

And meanwhile Madame, who was standing buried in thought, and as agitated as the young man himself, turned aside her head as he but a minute before had turned aside his. Then, after a moment's pause, she said, "And you love me, then, very much?"—"Madly,—madly enough to die from it, whether you drive me from you or whether you listen to me still."—"It is,

then, a hopeless case," she said in a playful manner,—" a case which must be treated with soothing applications. Give me your hand; it is as cold as ice."

De Guiche knelt down and pressed to his lips not one, but both, of Madame's burning hands. " Love me, then," said the princess, " since it cannot be otherwise;" and almost imperceptibly she pressed his fingers, raising him thus, partly in the manner of a queen and partly as a fond and affectionate woman would have done. De Guiche trembled from head to foot; and Madame, who felt how passion coursed through every fibre of his being, knew that he indeed loved truly. " Give me your arm, Count," she said, " and let us return."

" Ah, Madame!" said the count, bewildered and with unsteady step, a fiery mist before his eyes, " you have discovered a third way of killing me."—" But happily it is the longest, is it not?" Madame replied, as she led him towards the grove of trees she had left.

CHAPTER CXX

ARAMIS'S CORRESPONDENCE

While De Guiche's affairs, which had been thus suddenly set to rights without his having been able to guess the cause of their improvement, assumed that unexpected change which we have seen them take, Raoul, in obedience to Madame's request, had withdrawn in order not to interrupt an explanation the results of which he was far from guessing, and he had joined the ladies of honour who were walking about in the flower-gardens.

During this time the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had returned to his own room, read De Wardes's letter with surprise; for it informed him, by the hand of his valet, of the sword-thrust received at Calais and of all the details of the adventure, and invited him to communicate to De Guiche and to Monsieur whatever there might be in the affair likely to be particularly disagreeable to either of them. De Wardes particularly endeavoured to prove to the cavalier the violence of Madame's affection for Buckingham, and he finished his letter by declaring that he thought this feeling was returned. The chevalier shrugged his shoulders on reading the latter paragraph; and in fact De Wardes was very much behindhand, as may have been

seen. De Wardes was still only at Buckingham's affair. The chevalier threw the letter over his shoulder upon an adjoining table, and said in a disdainful tone: "It is really incredible! That poor De Wardes is not deficient in intelligence; but truly he does appear so in this matter, so easy is it to grow rusty in the country. The deuce take the simpleton, who ought to have written to me about matters of importance, and who writes such silly stuff as that! If it hadn't been for that miserable letter, which has no sense at all in it, I should have detected in the grove yonder a charming little intrigue, which would have compromised a woman, would have perhaps been as good as a sword-thrust for a man, and have diverted Monsieur for some days to come."

He looked at his watch. "It is now too late," he said. "One o'clock in the morning; every one must have returned to the king's apartments, where the night is to be finished. Well, the scent is lost; and unless some extraordinary chance—" And thus saying, as if to appeal to his good star, the chevalier, much out of temper, approached the window, which looked out upon a somewhat solitary part of the garden. Immediately, and as if some evil genius had been at his orders, he perceived returning towards the château, accompanied by a man, a silk mantle of a dark colour, and recognised the figure which had attracted his attention half an hour previously. "Eh! *mon Dieu!*" he thought, clapping his hands together; "here is my mystery;" and he started precipitately down the staircase, hoping to reach the courtyard in time to recognise the woman in the mantle and her companion. But as he arrived at the door in the little court, he nearly ran against Madame, whose radiant face seemed full of charming revelations beneath the mantle which protected without concealing her. Unfortunately, Madame was alone. The chevalier knew that since he had seen her not five minutes before with a gentleman, the gentleman in question could not be far off. Consequently he hardly took time to salute the princess as he drew up to allow her to pass; then, when she had advanced a few steps with the rapidity of a woman who fears recognition, and when the chevalier perceived that she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to trouble herself about him, he darted into the garden, looked hastily about on every side, and embraced within his glance as much of the horizon as he possibly could. He was just in time. The gentleman who had accompanied Madame was still in sight; only he was rapidly hurrying towards one of the wings of the château,

behind which he was just on the point of disappearing. There was not a minute to be lost. The chevalier darted in pursuit of him, prepared to slacken his pace as he approached the unknown; but in spite of the diligence he used, the unknown had disappeared behind the flight of steps before he reached the spot.

It was evident, however, that as he whom the chevalier pursued was walking quietly, in a very pensive manner, with his head bent down either beneath the weight of grief or of happiness, when once the angle was passed, unless indeed he were to enter by some door or other, the chevalier could not fail to overtake him. And this certainly would have happened if at the very moment when he turned the angle the chevalier had not run against two persons who were themselves turning it in the opposite direction. The chevalier was quite ready to seek a quarrel with these two troublesome intruders, when raising his head he recognised Monsieur the Superintendent.

Fouquet was accompanied by a person whom the chevalier now saw for the first time. This stranger was his grace the Bishop of Vannes. Checked by the important character of the individual, and obliged by propriety to make his own excuses when he expected to receive them, the chevalier stepped back a pace or two. And as M. Fouquet possessed, if not the friendship, at least the respect of every one; as the king himself, although he was rather his enemy than his friend, treated M. Fouquet as a man of great consideration,—the chevalier did what the king would have done; namely, he bowed to M. Fouquet, who returned his salutation with kindly politeness, perceiving that the gentleman had run against him by mistake and without any intention of being rude. Then almost immediately afterwards, having recognised the Chevalier de Lorraine, he made a few civil remarks, to which the chevalier was obliged to reply. Brief as the conversation was, the Chevalier de Lorraine saw with the most unfeigned displeasure the figure of his unknown becoming less and less in the distance, and fast disappearing in the darkness. The chevalier resigned himself, and once resigned, gave his entire attention to M. Fouquet. "You arrive late, Monsieur," he said. "Your absence has occasioned great surprise, and I heard Monsieur express himself as much astonished that having been invited by the king, you had not come."

"It was impossible for me to do so, Monsieur; but I came as soon as I was free."—"Is Paris quiet?"—"Perfectly so.

Paris has received the last tax very well."—"Ah, I understand! You wished to assure yourself of this good feeling before you came to participate in our festivities."—"I have arrived, however, somewhat late to enjoy them. I will ask you therefore, Monsieur, to inform me if the king is within the château, if I shall be able to see him to-night, or if I am to wait until to-morrow."—"We lost sight of the king about half an hour ago," said the chevalier.

"Perhaps he is in Madame's apartments," inquired Fouquet. —"Not in Madame's apartments, I should think, for I have just met Madame as she was entering by the small staircase; and unless the gentleman whom you just now passed was the king himself—" and the chevalier paused, hoping that in this manner he might learn who it was he had been pursuing. But Fouquet, whether he had or had not recognised De Guiche, simply replied, "No, Monsieur, it was not he."

The chevalier, disappointed, saluted them; but as he did so, casting a parting glance around him, and perceiving M. Colbert in the centre of a group, he said to the superintendent, "Stay, Monsieur! there is some one under the trees yonder, who will be able to inform you better than myself."—"Who?" asked Fouquet, whose near-sightedness prevented his seeing through the darkness.—"M. Colbert," returned the chevalier.

"Ah, indeed! That person, then, who is speaking yonder to those men with torches in their hands is M. Colbert?"— "M. Colbert himself. He is giving his orders for to-morrow to the workmen who are arranging the lamps for the illuminations." —"Thank you, Monsieur," said Fouquet, with an inclination of the head which indicated that he had obtained all the information he wished. The chevalier, on his side, having on the contrary learned nothing at all, withdrew with a profound salutation.

He had scarcely left, when Fouquet, knitting his brows, fell into a deep reverie. Aramis looked at him for a moment with a mingled feeling of compassion and sadness. "What!" he said to him; "that man's name alone seems to affect you. Is it possible that, full of triumph and delight as you were just now, the sight merely of that apparition is capable of dispiriting you? Tell me, Monsieur, have you faith in your good star?" —"No," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"Why not?"—"Because I am too full of happiness at this present moment," he replied in a trembling voice. "Ah, my dear D'Herblay, you, who are so learned, will remember the

history of a certain tyrant of Samos. What can I throw into the sea to avert approaching evil? Yes, I repeat it once more, my friend: I am too happy,—so happy that I wish for nothing beyond what I have. I have risen so high,—you know my motto, *Quo non ascendam*,—I have risen so high that nothing is left to me but to descend. I cannot believe in the progress of a success which is already more than human."

Aramis smiled as he fixed his kind and penetrating glance upon Fouquet. "If I were aware of the cause of your happiness," he said, "I should probably dread your disgrace; but you regard me in the light of a true friend,—I mean, you turn to me in misfortune, nothing more. Even that is an immense and precious boon, I know; but the truth is, I have a just right to beg you to confide in me, from time to time, any fortunate circumstances which may befall you, and in which I should rejoice, you know, more than if they had befallen myself."

"My dear prelate," said Fouquet, laughing, "my secrets are of too profane a character to confide them to a bishop, however great a worldling he may be."—"Bah! in confession?"—"Oh. I should blush too much if you were my confessor!" and Fouquet began to sigh. Aramis again looked at him without any other betrayal of his thoughts than a quiet smile. "Well," he said, "discretion is a great virtue."

"Silence!" said Fouquet; "that venomous beast has recognised me, and is coming this way."—"Colbert?"—"Yes. Leave me, my dear D'Herblay; I do not wish that dirty pedant to see you with me, or he will take an aversion to you."

Aramis pressed his hand, saying, "What need have I of his friendship, while you are here?"—"Yes, but I may not be always here," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.—"On that day, then, if that day should ever come," said Aramis, tranquilly, "we will think over a means of dispensing with M. Colbert's friendship, or of braving his dislike. But tell me, my dear Fouquet, instead of conversing with this dirty pedant, as you did him the honour to style him,—a conversation the utility of which I do not perceive,—why do you not pay a visit, if not to the king, at least to Madame?"

"To Madame!" said the superintendent, his mind occupied by his fond reminiscences. "Yes, certainly, to Madame."—"You remember," continued Aramis, "that we have been told that Madame stands high in favour during the last two or three days. It enters into your policy, I think, and forms part of our plans, that you should assiduously devote yourself to his

Majesty's friends. It is a means of counteracting the growing influence of M. Colbert. Present yourself, therefore, as soon as possible to Madame, and treat this ally with consideration."

"But," said Fouquet, "are you quite sure that it is really upon her that the king has his eyes fixed at the present moment?" —"If the needle has turned, it must be since the morning. You know I have my police."—"Very well. I will go there at once; and at all events I shall have a means of introduction, in the shape of a magnificent pair of antique cameos set round with diamonds."—"I have seen them, and nothing could be more costly and regal."

At this moment they were interrupted by a servant followed by a courier. "For Monsieur the Superintendent," said the courier, aloud, presenting a letter to Fouquet.—"For his grace the Bishop of Vannes," said the lackey, in a low tone, handing Aramis a letter. And as the lackey carried a torch, he placed himself between the superintendent and the bishop, so that both of them could read at the same time. As Fouquet looked at the fine and delicate writing on the envelope, he started with delight; they who love or who are beloved will understand his anxiety in the first place, and his happiness in the next. He hastily tore open the letter, which contained only these words,—

"It is but an hour since I left you; it is an age since I told you that I love you."

And that was all. Madame de Bellière had, in fact, left Fouquet about an hour previously, after having passed two days with him; and apprehensive lest remembrance of her might be banished for too long a period from the heart she missed, she despatched a courier to him as the bearer of this important communication. Fouquet kissed the letter, and rewarded the bearer with a handful of gold.

As for Aramis, he on his side was engaged in reading, but with more coolness and deliberation, the following note:

"The king has this evening been struck with a strange fancy. A woman loves him; he learned it accidentally as he was listening to the conversation of this young girl with her companions, and his Majesty has entirely abandoned himself to this new caprice. The girl's name is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and her beauty is passable enough to warrant this caprice becoming a strong attachment. Beware of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

There was not a word about Madame. Aramis slowly folded

the note and put it in his pocket. Fouquet was still engaged in inhaling the perfume of his epistle. "Monseigneur," said Aramis, touching Fouquet's arm.—"Yes; what is it?" he asked.

"An idea has just occurred to me. Are you acquainted with a young girl by the name of La Vallière?"—"Not at all."—"Reflect a little."—"Ah, yes! I believe so,—one of Madame's maids of honour."—"That must be the one."

"Well, what then?"—"Well, Monseigneur, it is to that young girl you must pay your visit this evening."—"Bah! why so?"—"Nay, more than that, it is to that young girl you must present your cameos."—"Nonsense!"—"You know, Monseigneur, that my advice is not to be regarded lightly."—"Yet this unforeseen—"—"That is my affair. Pay your court in due form to little La Vallière, Monseigneur. I will be your guarantee with Madame de Bellière that your devotion is altogether politic."

"What do you mean, my friend?" exclaimed Fouquet, quickly; "and whose name have you just pronounced?"—"A name which ought to convince you, Monsieur the Superintendent, that as I am so well informed about yourself, I may possibly be as well informed about others. Pay your court, therefore, to La Vallière."—"I will pay my court to whomsoever you like," replied Fouquet, his heart filled with happiness.

"Come, come! descend again to the earth, traveller of the seventh heaven!" said Aramis; "here is M. de Colbert. He has been recruiting while we were reading; see how he is surrounded, praised, congratulated; he is decidedly becoming powerful." In fact, Colbert was advancing, escorted by all the courtiers who remained in the gardens, every one of whom was so complimenting him upon the arrangements of the *fête* as to puff him up so that he could hardly contain himself. "If La Fontaine were here," said Fouquet, smiling, "what an admirable opportunity for him to recite his fable of 'The Frog that wished to make itself as big as the Ox'!"

Colbert came up in the centre of a circle blazing with light. Fouquet awaited his approach unmoved, and with a slightly mocking smile. Colbert smiled too; he had been observing his enemy during the last quarter of an hour, and had been approaching him gradually. Colbert's smile was a presage of hostility. "Oh!" said Aramis, in a low tone, to the superintendent; "the scoundrel is going to ask you again for a few more millions to pay for his fireworks and his coloured lamps."

Colbert was the first to make his salute, and with an air which

he endeavoured to render respectful. Fouquet hardly moved his head. "Well, Monseigneur," asked Colbert, "what do your eyes say? Have we shown good taste?"—"Perfect taste," replied Fouquet, without permitting the slightest tone of raillery to be remarked in his words.

"Oh," said Colbert, maliciously, "you are treating us with indulgence! Some of us servants of the king are poor; and Fontainebleau is in no way to be compared as a residence with Vaux."—"Quite true," replied Fouquet, coolly, who domineered over all the participants in this scene.

"But what can we do, Monseigneur?" continued Colbert; "we have done our best according to our slender resources." Fouquet made a gesture of assent. "But," pursued Colbert, "it would be only a proper display of your magnificence, Monseigneur, if you were to offer to his Majesty a *fête* in your wonderful gardens,—in those gardens which have cost you sixty millions."—"Seventy-two," said Fouquet.—"An additional reason," returned Colbert; "it would indeed be truly magnificent."

"But do you suppose, Monsieur," said Fouquet, "that his Majesty would deign to accept my invitation?"—"I have no doubt whatever of it," cried Colbert, hastily; "I will guarantee that he does."—"You are exceedingly kind," said Fouquet. "I may depend on it, then?"—"Yes, Monseigneur; yes, certainly."—"Then I will consider it," said Fouquet.

"Accept, accept!" whispered Aramis, eagerly.—"You will consider it?" repeated Colbert.—"Yes," replied Fouquet, "in order to know what day I shall submit my invitation to the king."—"Oh, this very evening, Monseigneur, this very evening!"—"Agreed," said the superintendent. "Messieurs, I should wish to extend to you my invitations; but you know that wherever the king goes he is in his own palace,—it is by his Majesty, therefore, that you must be invited."

A murmur of delight immediately arose. Fouquet bowed and left. "Proud and haughty man," said Colbert, "you accept, and you know it will cost you ten millions."

"You have ruined me," said Fouquet, in a low tone to Aramis.—"I have saved you," replied the latter; while Fouquet ascended the flight of steps and inquired whether the king were still visible.

CHAPTER CXXI

THE ORDERLY CLERK

THE king, anxious to be again quite alone, in order to reflect well upon what was passing in his heart, had withdrawn to his own apartments, where M. de Saint-Aignan had, after his conversation with Madame, gone to meet him. This conversation has already been related. The favourite, vain of his twofold importance, feeling that he had become during the last two hours the confidant of the king, became less reverential, and began to treat the affairs of the court in a somewhat indifferent manner; from the position in which he had placed himself, or rather where chance had placed him, he saw nothing but love and garlands of flowers around him. The king's love for Madame, that of Madame for the king, that of De Guiche for Madame, that of La Vallière for the king, that of Malicorne for Montalais, that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente for him, De Saint-Aignan,—was not all this, truly, more than enough to turn the head of any courtier? Besides, De Saint-Aignan was the model of all courtiers, past, present, and future; and, moreover, De Saint-Aignan showed himself such an excellent narrator, and was so discerningly appreciative, that the king listened to him with an appearance of great interest, particularly when he described the excited manner with which Madame had sought for him to converse about the affair of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Although the king no longer experienced for Madame Henrietta any remains of the passion he had once felt for her, there was, in this eagerness of Madame to procure information about him, a gratification for his vanity from which he could not free himself. He experienced this gratification, then, but nothing more; and his heart was not for a single moment alarmed at what Madame might or might not think of this whole adventure.

When, however, De Saint-Aignan had finished, the king, while preparing to retire to rest, asked, "Now, Saint-Aignan, you know what Mademoiselle de la Vallière is, do you not?"—"Not only what she is, but what she will be."—"What do you mean?"—"I mean that she is everything that a woman can wish to be,—that is to say, beloved by your Majesty; I mean that she will be everything your Majesty may wish her to be."

"That is not what I am asking. I do not wish to know what

she is to-day, or what she will be to-morrow,—as you have remarked, that is my affair,—but what she was yesterday. Repeat to me what others say of her."—"They say that she is chaste."—"Oh," said the king, smiling, "that is but report!"—"But rare enough at court, Sire, to believe it when it is spread."

"Perhaps you are right, my friend. Is she well-born?"—"Excellently so; the daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, and step-daughter of that good M. de Saint-Remy."—"Ah, yes, my aunt's major-domo! I remember that; and I remember now that I saw her as I passed through Blois. She was presented to the queens. I have even to reproach myself that I did not on that occasion pay her all the attention she deserved."—"Oh, Sire, I trust that your Majesty will repair the time you have lost!"—"And the report, you tell me, is that Mademoiselle de la Vallière never had a lover."—"In any case, I do not think your Majesty would be much alarmed at any rivalry."

"Yet, stay!" exclaimed the king, all at once, in a very serious tone of voice.—"Your Majesty?"—"I remember."—"Ah!"—"If she has no lover, she has at least a betrothed."

"A betrothed!"—"What! Count, do you not know that?"—"No."—"You,—the man who knows all the news?"—"Your Majesty will excuse me. Your Majesty knows this betrothed, then?"—"Assuredly! His father came to ask me to sign the marriage contract; it is—" The king was about to pronounce the Vicomte de Bragelonne's name, when he stopped and knitted his brows.

"It is—" repeated De Saint-Aignan, inquiringly.—"I don't remember now," replied Louis XIV., endeavouring to conceal an annoyance which he had some trouble to disguise.—"Can I put your Majesty in the way?" inquired the Comte de Saint-Aignan.—"No; for I myself no longer know to whom I intended to refer. Indeed, I only remember very indistinctly that one of the maids of honour was to marry—the name, however, has escaped me."

"Was it Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente he was going to marry?" inquired De Saint-Aignan.—"Very likely," said the king.—"In that case the intended was M. de Montespan; but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not speak of it, it seemed to me, in such a manner as would frighten away suitors."'

"At all events," said the king, "I know nothing, or almost nothing, about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Saint-Aignan, I rely upon you to procure me some information about her."—

"Yes, Sire; and when shall I have the honour of seeing your Majesty again, to give you the information?"—"Whenever you shall have procured it."—"I shall obtain it speedily if the information will come as quickly as my wish to see your Majesty again."

"Well said! By the by, has Madame displayed any ill-feeling against this poor girl?"—"None, Sire."—"Madame did not get angry, then?"—"I do not know; I only know that she laughed continually."—"Very well; but I think I hear voices in the anterooms,—no doubt a courier has just arrived. Inquire, Saint-Aignan."

The count ran to the door and exchanged a few words with the usher; he returned to the king, saying, "Sire, it is M. Fouquet, who has this moment arrived by your Majesty's orders, he says. He presented himself, but because of the advanced hour he does not press for an audience this evening, and is satisfied to have his presence here formally announced."—"M. Fouquet! I wrote to him at three o'clock, inviting him to be at Fontainebleau to-morrow morning, and he arrives at Fontainebleau at eleven o'clock. This is, indeed, zeal!" exclaimed the king, delighted to see himself so promptly obeyed. "On the contrary, M. Fouquet shall have his audience. I summoned him, and will receive him. Let him be introduced. As for you, Count, pursue your inquiries, and be here to-morrow." The king placed his finger on his lips; and De Saint-Aignan, his heart overflowing with delight, hastily withdrew, giving the order to the usher to introduce M. Fouquet, who thereupon entered the king's apartment. Louis XIV. rose to receive him.

"Good-evening, M. Fouquet," he said, smiling graciously. "I congratulate you on your punctuality; and yet my message must have reached you late?"—"At nine in the evening, Sire."—"You have been working very hard lately, M. Fouquet, for I have been informed that you have not left your office at St. Mandé during the last three or four days."—"I have, in fact, Sire, kept myself shut up for the past three days," replied Fouquet, bowing.

"Do you know, M. Fouquet, that I have a great many things to say to you?" continued the king, with his most gracious air.—"Your Majesty overwhelms me; and since you are so graciously disposed towards me, will your Majesty permit me to remind you of the promise your Majesty made me to grant an audience?"—"Ah, yes; some church dignitary, who thinks he has to thank me for something, is it not?"

"Precisely so, Sire. The hour is perhaps badly chosen. But the time of the companion whom I have brought with me is valuable; and as Fontainebleau is on the way to his diocese—" "Who is it, then?"—"The last bishop of Vannes, whom your Majesty by my recommendation condescended to invest three months since."—"That is very possible," said the king, who had signed the appointment without reading; "and is he here?"—"Yes, Sire. Vannes is an important diocese. The flock belonging to this pastor need his religious consolation; they are savages, whom it is necessary to polish at the same time that he instructs them, and M. d'Herblay is unequalled in missions of that kind."

"M. d'Herblay!" said the king, musingly, as if that name, heard long since, was not however unknown to him.—"Oh!" said Fouquet, promptly, "your Majesty is not acquainted with the obscure name of one of your most faithful and most valuable servants?"—"No, I confess I am not. And so he wishes to set off again?"—"He has this very day received letters which will perhaps necessitate his departure; so that, before setting off for that unknown region called Bretagne, he is desirous of paying his respects to your Majesty."—"Is he waiting?"—"He is here, Sire."—"Let him enter."

Fouquet made a sign to the usher in attendance, who was waiting behind the tapestry. The door opened, and Aramis entered. The king allowed him to finish the compliments which he addressed to him, and fixed a long look upon a countenance which no one could forget, after having once beheld it.

"Vannes!" he said; "you are Bishop of Vannes, Monsieur?"—"Yes, Sire."—"Vannes is in Bretagne, I think?" Aramis bowed. "Near the sea?" Aramis again bowed. "A few leagues from Belle-Isle, is it not?"—"Yes, Sire," replied Aramis; "six leagues, I believe."—"Six leagues; a mere step, then," said Louis XIV.—"Not for us poor Bretons, Sire," replied Aramis. "Six leagues, on the contrary, is a great distance if it be six leagues on land, and an immense distance if it be leagues on the sea. Now, I have had the honour to mention to your Majesty that there are six leagues of sea from the river to Belle-Isle."

"It is said that M. Fouquet has a very beautiful house there?" inquired the king.—"Yes, it is said so," said Aramis, looking quietly at Fouquet.—"What do you mean by 'it is said so'?" exclaimed the king.—"He has, Sire."

"Really, M. Fouquet, I must confess that one circumstance

surprises me."—"What may that be?"—"Why, that you should have at the head of your parishes a man like M. d'Herblay, and yet should not have shown him Belle-Isle?"—"Oh, Sire," replied the bishop, without giving Fouquet time to answer, "we poor Breton prelates seldom leave our residences."—"M. de Vannes," said the king, "I will punish M. Fouquet for his indifference."—"In what way, Sire?"—"I will change your bishopric."

Fouquet bit his lips, but Aramis only smiled. "What income does Vannes bring you in?" continued the king.—"Six thousand livres, Sire," said Aramis.—"So trifling an amount as that! But you possess other property, M. de Vannes?"—"I have nothing else, Sire; only, M. Fouquet pays me twelve hundred livres a year for his churchwarden's pew."—"Well, well, M. d'Herblay, I promise you something better than that."—"Sire—"—"I will not forget you."

Aramis bowed; and the king also bowed to him in a respectful manner, as he was always accustomed to do to women and members of the Church. Aramis understood that his audience was at an end; he took his leave of the king in the simple, unpretending language of a country pastor, and disappeared.

"His is, indeed, a remarkable face," said the king, following him with his eyes as long as he could see him, and even to a certain degree when he was no longer to be seen.—"Sire," replied Fouquet, "if that bishop had been educated early in life, no prelate in the kingdom would deserve the highest distinctions better than he."—"His learning is not extensive, then?"—"He changed the sword for the chasuble, and that rather late in life. But it matters little, if your Majesty will permit me to speak of M. de Vannes again in a time and place—"

"I beg you to do so. But before speaking of him, let us speak of yourself, M. Fouquet."—"Of me, Sire?"—"Yes, I have to pay you a thousand compliments."—"I really cannot express to your Majesty the delight with which you overwhelm me."

"Yes, M. Fouquet, I understand you. I confess, however, to have had certain prejudices against you."—"In that case I was indeed unfortunate, Sire."—"But they exist no longer. Did you not perceive—"—"I did indeed, Sire. But I awaited with resignation the day when truth would prevail; and it seems that that day has now arrived."—"Ah! you knew, then, you were in disgrace with me?"—"Alas, Sire, yes!"

"And do you know the reason?"—"Perfectly well; your Majesty thought that I had been wastefully lavish in expendi-

ture."—"Oh, no!"—"Or, rather, an indifferent administrator. In a word, your Majesty thought that as the people had no money there would be none for your Majesty either."—"Yes, I thought so; but I was deceived." Fouquet bowed. "And no disturbances, no complaints?"—"And money enough," said Fouquet.

"The fact is that you have been profuse with it during the last month."—"I have more still, not only for all your Majesty's requirements, but for all your caprices."—"Thank Heaven! M. Fouquet," replied the king, seriously, "I will not put you to the proof. For the next two months I do not intend to ask you for anything."

"I will avail myself of the interval to amass for your Majesty five or six millions, which will be serviceable as money in hand in case of war."—"Five or six millions!"—"For the expenses of your Majesty's household only, be it understood."—"You think that war is probable, M. Fouquet?"—"I think that if Heaven has bestowed on the eagle a beak and claws, it is to enable him to show his royal character."

The king blushed with pleasure. "We have spent a great deal of money these few days past, M. Fouquet; will you not scold me for it?"—"Sire, your Majesty has still twenty years of youth to enjoy, and a thousand million livres to spend in those twenty years."—"A thousand million! that is a great deal of money, M. Fouquet," said the king.

"I will economise, Sire. Besides, your Majesty has two valuable men in M. Colbert and myself. The one will encourage you to be prodigal with your money,—and this shall be myself, if my services should continue to be agreeable to your Majesty; and the other will economise for you, and this will be M. Colbert's province."—"M. Colbert?" returned the king, astonished.—"Certainly, Sire; M. Colbert is an excellent accountant."

At this commendation bestowed by the enemy on the enemy himself, the king felt himself penetrated with confidence and admiration. There was not, moreover, either in Fouquet's voice or look anything which injuriously affected a single syllable of the remark he had made; he did not pass one eulogium, as it were, in order to acquire the right of making two reproaches. The king comprehended him, and yielding to so much generosity and address he said, "You praise M. Colbert, then?"—"Yes, Sire, I praise him; for besides being a man of merit, I believe him to be very devoted to your Majesty's

interests."—"Is that because he has often interfered with your own views?" said the king, smiling.—"Exactly, Sire."

"Explain that to me."—"It is simple enough. I am the man who is needed to make the money come in; he, the man who is needed to prevent it from leaving." "Nay, nay, Monsieur the Superintendent, you will presently say something which will amend all this good opinion?"—"Do you mean so far as administrative abilities are concerned, Sire?"—"Yes."—"Not in the slightest."—"Really?"—"Upon my honour, Sire, I do not know throughout France a better clerk than M. Colbert." This word "clerk" did not possess, in 1661, the somewhat subservient signification which is attached to it in the present day; but as spoken by Fouquet, whom the king had just addressed as Monsieur the Superintendent, it seemed to acquire an insignificant and petty character, which served admirably to restore Fouquet to his own place, and Colbert to his.

"And yet," said Louis XIV., "it was he, nevertheless, who notwithstanding his economy had the arrangement of my *fêtes* here at Fontainebleau; and I assure you, M. Fouquet, that in no way has he interfered with the expenditure of my money." Fouquet bowed, but did not reply. "Is it not your opinion too?" said the king.

"I think, Sire," he replied, "that M. Colbert has done what he had to do in an exceedingly orderly manner, and that he deserves in this respect all the praise your Majesty may bestow upon him." The word "orderly" was a proper accompaniment for the word "clerk." Louis XIV. possessed that extreme sensitiveness of organisation, that delicacy of perception, which pierced through and detected the regular order of feelings and sensations, before the actual sensations themselves; and he therefore comprehended that the clerk had, in Fouquet's opinion, been too full of method and order in his arrangements,—in other words, that the magnificent *fêtes* of Fontainebleau might have been rendered more magnificent still. The king consequently felt that there was something in the amusements he had provided with which some person or other might be able to find fault; he experienced a little of the annoyance felt by one coming from the provinces to Paris, dressed out in the very best clothes which his wardrobe can furnish, who finds that the fashionably dressed man there looks at him either too much or not enough. This part of the conversation, which Fouquet had carried on with so much moderation yet with such

extreme tact, inspired the king with still higher esteem for the character of the man and the capacity of the minister.

Fouquet took his leave at one o'clock in the morning, and the king went to bed a little uneasy and confused at the indirect lesson he had just received; and two good quarters of an hour were employed by him in going over again in his memory the embroideries, the tapestries, the *menus* of the banquets, the architecture of the triumphal arches, the arrangements for the illuminations and fireworks, all ordered by the "clerk Colbert." The result was that the king passed in review before him everything that had taken place during the last week, and decided that several faults could be found in his *fêtes*. But Fouquet by his politeness, his thoughtful consideration, and his generosity had injured Corbert more deeply than the latter by his artifice, his ill-will, and his persevering hatred had ever succeeded in injuring Fouquet.

CHAPTER CXXII

FONTAINEBLEAU AT TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

As we have seen, De Saint-Aignan had quitted the king's apartment at the very moment when the superintendent entered it. De Saint-Aignan was charged with a mission which required despatch; that is as much as saying that he was going to do his utmost to turn his time to good account. He whom we have introduced as the king's friend was indeed an uncommon personage. He was one of those valuable courtiers whose vigilance and acuteness of perception at this crisis threw all past and future favourites into the shade, counterbalancing by his close attention the servility of Dangeau, who was not the favourite but the toady of the king. M. de Saint-Aignan began to consider what was to be done in the present position of affairs. He reflected that his first information ought to come from De Guiche. He therefore set out in search of him; but De Guiche, whom we saw disappear behind one of the wings of the château, and who seemed to have returned to his own apartments, had not entered the château. De Saint-Aignan therefore went in quest of him; and after having turned and twisted and searched in every direction, he perceived something like a human form leaning against a tree. This figure was as motion-

less as a statue, and seemed deeply engaged in looking at a window, although the curtains of this window were closely drawn. As this window happened to be Madame's, De Saint-Aignan concluded that the form in question must be that of De Guiche. He advanced cautiously, and found that he was not mistaken. De Guiche had, after his conversation with Madame, carried away such a weight of happiness that all his strength of mind was hardly sufficient to enable him to support it. On his side, De Saint-Aignan knew that De Guiche had had something to do with La Vallière's introduction to Madame's household, for a courtier knows everything and forgets nothing; but he had never learned under what title or what conditions De Guiche had conferred his protection upon La Vallière. But, as in asking a great many questions it is singular if a man does not learn something, De Saint-Aignan reckoned upon learning much or little, as it might be, if he were to question De Guiche with that extreme tact and at the same time with that persistence in attaining an object of which he was capable.

De Saint-Aignan's plan was the following: If the information obtained was satisfactory, he would inform the king with effusion that he had alighted upon a pearl, and would claim the privilege of setting that pearl in the royal crown; if the information were unsatisfactory,—which, after all, might be possible,—he would examine how far the king cared about La Vallière, and make use of his information in such a manner as to get rid of the girl altogether, and thereby obtain all the merit of her banishment with all those ladies of the court who might have any pretensions upon the king's heart, beginning with Madame and ending with the queen. In case the king should show himself obstinate in his fancy, then he would not produce the damaging information he had obtained, but would let La Vallière know that this damaging information was carefully preserved in a secret drawer of her confidant's memory. In this manner he would be able to display his generosity before the poor girl's eyes, and so keep her in constant suspense between gratitude and apprehension,—to such an extent as to make her a friend at court, interested, as an accomplice, in making her accomplice's fortune while she was making her own. As for the day when the bomb-shell of the past should burst,—supposing there should ever be any occasion for its bursting,—De Saint-Aignan promised himself that he would by that time have taken all possible precautions, and would pretend an entire ignorance of the matter to the king; while with regard to La

Vallière, he would still even on that day have an opportunity of being considered the personification of generosity.

It was with such ideas as these, which the fire of covetousness had caused to dawn into being in half an hour, that De Saint-Aignan—the best son in the world, as La Fontaine would have said—set off with the well-defined intention of making De Guiche speak; in other words, to trouble him in his happiness,—a happiness of which De Saint-Aignan was quite ignorant. It was one o'clock in the morning when De Saint-Aignan perceived De Guiche standing motionless, leaning against the trunk of a tree with his eyes fastened upon that lighted window. One o'clock in the morning,—that is, the softest hour of night-time; that which painters crown with myrtles and budding poppies; the hour when eyes are heavy, hearts are throbbing, and heads feel dull and languid; an hour which casts upon the day which has passed away a look of regret, which addresses a loving greeting to the dawn of another. For De Guiche it was the dawn of unutterable happiness; he would have bestowed a treasure upon a beggar, had he stood before him, to secure him an uninterrupted indulgence in his dreams. It was precisely at this hour that De Saint-Aignan, badly advised (selfishness always counsels badly), came and struck him on the shoulder at the very moment when he was murmuring a word, or rather a name. "Ah," he cried loudly, "I was looking for you!"—"For me?" said De Guiche, starting.—"Yes; and I find you moon-struck. Is it likely, my dear Count, that you have been attacked by the poetical malady, and are making verses?"

The young man forced a smile upon his lips, while a thousand very different feelings were muttering against De Saint-Aignan in the deep recesses of his heart. "Perhaps," he said; "but by what happy chance—"—"Ah! your remark shows that you did not hear what I said."—"How so?"—"Why, I began by telling you I was looking for you."

"You were looking for me?"—"Yes; and I find you now in the very act."—"Of doing what, I should like to know?"—"Of singing the praises of Phyllis."—"Well, I do not deny it," said De Guiche, laughing. "Yes, my dear Count, I was celebrating Phyllis's praises."—"And you have acquired the right to do so."—"I?"—"You; no doubt of it,—you, the intrepid protector of every beautiful and clever woman."

"In the name of goodness, what story have you got hold of now?"—"Acknowledged truths, I am well aware. But stay

a moment! I am in love."—"You?"—"Yes."—"So much the better, my dear Count. Come and tell me all about it;" and De Guiche, afraid that De Saint-Aignan might perhaps presently observe that lighted window, took the count's arm and endeavoured to lead him away.

"Oh!" said the latter, resisting, "do not take me towards those dark woods; it is too damp there. Let us stay in the moonlight, if you please;" and while he yielded to the pressure of De Guiche's arm, he tarried in the flower-garden adjoining the château.—"Well," said De Guiche, resigning himself, "lead me where you like, and ask me what you please."—"It is impossible to be more agreeable than you are;" and then, after a moment's silence, De Saint-Aignan continued, "My dear Count, I wish you to tell me something about a certain person in whom you have interested yourself."—"And with whom you are in love?"

"I will neither admit nor deny it. You understand that a man does not very readily place his heart where there is no hope of return, and that it is most essential he should take measures of security in advance."—"You are right," said De Guiche, with a sigh; "a heart is a precious gft."—"Mine particularly is very tender, and in that light I present it to you."—"Oh, you are well known, Count! Well?"

"It is simply a question of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."—"Why, my dear Saint-Aignan, you are losing your senses, I should think."—"Why so?"—"I have never shown or taken any interest in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."—"Bah!"—"Never."

"Was it not you who obtained admission for Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente into Madame's household?"—"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente—and you ought to know it better than any one else, my dear Count—is of a sufficiently good family to make her presence here desirable, and a greater reason therefore to render her admittance very easy."—"You are jesting."—"No; and upon my honour, I do not know what you mean."—"And you positively had nothing, then, to do with her admission?"—"No."—"You do not know her?"—"I saw her for the first time the day she was presented to Madame. Therefore, as I have never been her patron, as I do not know her, I am not able to give you the information you require;" and De Guiche made a movement as though to leave his questioner.

"Nay, nay, one moment, my dear Count," said Saint-Aignan;

"you shall not escape me in this manner."—"I beg your pardon, but really it seems to me that it is now time to return to our apartments."—"And yet you were not going in when I—did not meet, but found you."—"Therefore, my dear Count," said De Guiche, "as long as you have anything to say to me, I place myself entirely at your service."

"And you are quite right in doing so. What matters half an hour more or less? Your lace will be neither the more nor less rumpled. Will you swear that you have no injurious communications to make to me about her, and that any injurious communications you might possibly have to make are not the cause of your silence?"—"Oh, I believe the poor child to be as pure as crystal!"—"You overwhelm me with joy. And yet I do not wish to have towards you the appearance of a man so badly informed as I seem. It is quite certain that you supplied the princess's household with the ladies of honour; nay, a song even has been written about it."

"You know, my dear friend, that songs are written about everything."—"Do you know it?"—"No; sing it to me and I shall make its acquaintance."—"I cannot tell you how it begins; I only remember how it ends."—"Very well; at all events, that is something."

"'Guiche is the furnisher
Of the maids of honour.'"

"The idea is weak, and the rhyming is poor."—"What can you expect, my dear fellow? It is not Racine's or Molière's, but La Feuillade's; and a great lord cannot rhyme like a beggarly poet."—"It is very unfortunate, though, that you remember only the termination."—"Stay, stay! I have just recollected the beginning of the second couplet,—

"'He has stocked the birdcage (*volière*),
Montalais and—'"

"*Pardieux!* 'and La Vallière'!" exclaimed De Guiche, impatiently, and completely ignorant, besides, of De Saint-Aignan's object.

"Yes, yes, that is it,—'La Vallière.' You have hit upon the rhyme, my dear fellow."—"A grand discovery, indeed!"—"Montalais and La Vallière,—these, then, are the two young girls in whom you interested yourself," said De Saint-Aignan, laughing.

"And so Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's name is not to be met with in the song?"—"No, indeed."—"And you are

satisfied, then?"—"Perfectly; but I find Montalais there," said De Saint-Aignan, still laughing.

"Oh, you will find her everywhere; she is a most active young lady."—"You know her?"—"Indirectly. She was the *protégée* of a man named Malicorne, who is a *protégé* of Manicamp. Manicamp asked me to get the situation of maid of honour for Montalais in Madame's household, and a situation for Malicorne, as an officer in Monsieur's household. Well, I asked for the appointments, and you know very well that I have a weakness for that droll fellow Manicamp."—"And you obtained what you sought?"—"For Montalais, yes; for Malicorne, yes and no,—for as yet he is only tolerated there. Do you wish to know anything else?"

"The last word of the couplet still remains,—'La Vallière,'" said De Saint-Aignan, resuming the smile which had so tormented De Guiche.—"Well," said the latter, "it is true that I obtained admission for her in Madame's household."—"Ah, ah!" said De Saint-Aignan.

"But," continued De Guiche, assuming the greatest coldness of manner, "you will oblige me, my dear Count, not to jest about that name. Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière is a young lady perfectly well-conducted."—"Perfectly well-conducted?"—"Yes."—"Then you have not heard the last rumour?" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan.—"No; and you will do me a service, my dear Count, in keeping this report to yourself and to those who circulate it."

"Ah! bah! you take the matter up very seriously."—"Yes; Mademoiselle de la Vallière is beloved by one of my best friends." De Saint-Aignan started. "Oh!" he said.—"Yes, Count," continued De Guiche; "and consequently you, the politest man in France, will understand that I cannot allow my friend to be placed in a ridiculous position."—"Oh, very well!" and De Saint-Aignan began to bite his nails, partially from vexation and partially from disappointed curiosity. De Guiche made him a very profound bow.

"You send me away?" said De Saint-Aignan, who was dying to learn the name of the friend.—"I do not send you away, my dear fellow,—I am going to finish my lines to Phyllis."—"And those lines—"—"Are a quatrain. You understand, I suppose, that a quatrain is a serious affair?"—"Of course."—"And as of these four lines, of which it is naturally composed, I have yet three and a half to make, I need my undivided attention."

"I quite understand. Adieu, Count! By the by—"—"What?"—"Are you quick at making verses?"—"Wonderfully so."—"Will you quite have finished the three lines and a half to-morrow morning?"—"I hope so."—"Adieu, then, until to-morrow."—"Till to-morrow, adieu!" De Saint-Aignan was obliged to accept the notice to quit; he accordingly did so, and disappeared behind the hedge. Their conversation had led De Guiche and De Saint-Aignan a good distance from the château.

Every mathematician, every poet, and every dreamer has his means of diverting his attention. De Saint-Aignan, then, on leaving De Guiche, found himself at the extremity of the grove,—at the very spot where the outbuildings for the servants begin, and where behind thickets of acacias and chestnut-trees interlacing their branches, which were hidden by masses of clematis and young vines, the wall which separated the woods from the courtyard of these outbuildings was erected. De Saint-Aignan, left alone, took the path which led towards these buildings; De Guiche going off in the very opposite direction. The one proceeded towards the flower-garden, while the other bent his steps towards the walls. De Saint-Aignan walked on between rows of the mountain-ash, lilac, and hawthorn, which formed an almost impenetrable roof above his head; his feet were buried in the soft gravel and in the thick moss. He was deliberating over a means of taking his revenge, which it seemed difficult for him to carry out, and was nonplussed, as Tallemant des Réaux would have said, by not having learned more about La Vallière, notwithstanding the ingenious tactics he had employed in order to acquire some information about her, when suddenly the sound of human voices attracted his attention. He heard whispers, the complaining tones of a woman's voice mingled with entreaties, smothered laughter, sighs, and half-stifled exclamations of surprise; but above them all, the woman's voice prevailed. De Saint-Aignan stopped to look about him; he perceived with the most intense surprise that the voices proceeded not from the ground but from the branches of the trees. As he glided along under the covered walk, he raised his head, and observed at the top of the wall a woman perched upon a ladder, in eager conversation with a man seated on a branch of a chestnut-tree, whose head alone could be seen, the rest of his body being concealed in the thick covert of the chestnut. The woman was on the near side of the wall, the man on the other side of it.

CHAPTER CXXIII

THE LABYRINTH

De Saint-Aignan, who had only been seeking for information, had met with an adventure. This was indeed a piece of good luck. Curious to learn why, and particularly about what, this man and woman were conversing at such an hour and in such a singular position, De Saint-Aignan made himself as small as he possibly could, and approached almost under the rounds of the ladder. Then taking measures to make himself as comfortable as possible, he leaned his back against a tree and listened, and heard the following conversation. The woman was the first to speak. "Really, M. Manicamp," she said, in a voice which notwithstanding the reproaches she addressed to him preserved a marked tone of coquetry, "really, your indiscreetness is of a very dangerous character. We cannot talk long in this manner without being observed."—"That is very probable," said the man, in the calmest and coolest of tones.

"In that case, then, what would people say? Oh, if any one were to see me, I declare I should die from very shame!"—"Oh, that would be very silly, and I do not believe you capable of it."—"It might have been different if there had been anything between us; but to do an injury to myself gratuitously is really very foolish of me. So, adieu, M. Manicamp!"

"So far, so good; I know the man, and now let me see who the woman is," said De Saint-Aignan, watching the rounds of the ladder on which were standing two pretty little feet covered with sky-blue satin shoes and flesh-coloured stockings.

"Nay, nay, for pity's sake, my dear Montalais," cried Manicamp, "deuce take it, do not go away! I have a great many things still to say to you, of the very greatest importance."—"Montalais," said De Saint-Aignan to himself,—"one of the three! Each of the three gossips had her adventure; only, I had thought that the hero of this one's adventure was M. Malicorne and not Manicamp."

At her companion's appeal Montalais stopped in the middle of her descent; and De Saint-Aignan could observe the unfortunate Manicamp climb up from one branch of the chestnut-tree to another, either to improve his situation or to overcome the fatigue consequent upon his cramped position. "Now

listen to me," said he; "you quite understand, I hope, that my intentions are perfectly innocent."

"Of course. But why did you write me that letter stimulating my gratitude towards you? Why did you ask me for an interview at such an hour and in such a place as this?"—"I stimulated your gratitude in reminding you that it was I who had been the means of your entering Madame's household. Because I was most anxiously desirous to obtain the interview which you have been kind enough to grant me, I employed the means which appeared to me the most certain to insure it. And my reason for soliciting it at such an hour and in such a locality was that the hour seemed to me to be the most prudent and the locality the least open to observation. Moreover, I had occasion to speak to you upon certain subjects which require both prudence and solitude."—"M. Manicamp!"

"But everything perfectly honourable, I assure you."—"I think, M. Manicamp, that it would be more becoming in me to take my leave."—"Nay, listen to me, or I shall jump from my perch here to yours; and be careful how you set me at defiance, for just at this moment a branch of this chestnut-tree causes me a good deal of annoyance and may provoke me to extreme measures. Do not follow the example of this branch, then, but listen to me."—"I am listening, and I will agree to do so; but be brief, for if you have a branch which annoys you, I wish you to understand that a three-cornered round of the ladder is hurting the soles of my feet, and my shoes are being cut through."

"Please to give me your hand, Mademoiselle."—"Why?"—"Will you have the goodness to do so?"—"There is my hand, then; but what are you going to do?"—"To draw you towards me."—"What for? You do not wish me to join you in the tree, I hope?"—"No; but I wish you to sit down upon the wall. There, that will do; there is quite room enough, and I would give a great deal to be allowed to sit down beside you."—"No, no; you are very well where you are. We should be seen."—"Do you really think so?" asked Manicamp, in an insinuating voice.—"I am sure of it."—"Very well; I remain in my tree, then, although I cannot be worse placed."—"M. Manicamp, we are wandering away from the subject."—"You are right."

"You wrote me a letter?"—"I did."—"Why did you write?"—"Fancy that at two o'clock to-day De Guiche left."—"What then?"—"Seeing him set off, I followed him, as I usually do."—"Of course I see that, since you are here now."

—"Don't be in a hurry! You are aware, I suppose, that poor De Guiche is up to his very neck in disgrace?"—"Alas, yes."

"It was the very height of imprudence on his part, then, to come to Fontainebleau to seek those who had at Paris sent him away into exile, and particularly those from whom he had been separated."—"M. Manicamp, you reason like Pythagoras of old."—"Moreover, De Guiche is as obstinate as a man in love can be, and he refused to listen to any of my remonstrances. I begged, I implored him, but he would not listen to anything. Oh, the deuce!"—"What's the matter?"—"I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle; but this confounded branch, about which I have already had the honour of speaking to you, has just torn a certain portion of my dress."—"It is quite dark," replied Montalais, laughing, "so pray continue, M. Manicamp."

"De Guiche set off on horseback as hard as he could, I following him, but at a slower pace. You quite understand that to go and throw one's self into the water, for instance, with a friend with the same headlong speed that he himself uses, would be the act either of a fool or of a madman. I therefore allowed De Guiche to get in advance, and I proceeded on my way with a commendable slowness of pace, feeling quite sure that my unfortunate friend would not be received, or if he had been, that he would ride off again at the very first cross, disagreeable answer, and that I should see him returning much faster than he had gone, without having myself gone farther than Ris or Melun,—and that was a good distance, you will admit, for it is eleven leagues to get there and as many to return."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders. "Laugh as much as you like, Mademoiselle; but if instead of being comfortably seated on the top of the wall, as you are, you were sitting on this branch, as if you were on horseback, you would, like Augustus, aspire to descend."—"Be patient, my dear M. Manicamp, a few minutes are soon passed; you were saying, then, that you had gone beyond Ris and Melun?"

"Yes, I went through Ris and Melun; and I continued to go on, more and more surprised that I did not see him returning; and here I am at last at Fontainebleau. I look for and inquire after De Guiche everywhere; but no one has seen him, no one in the town has spoken to him. He arrived riding at full gallop; he entered the château, where he has disappeared. I have been here at Fontainebleau since eight o'clock this evening inquiring for De Guiche in every direction, but no De Guiche can be found. I am dying from uneasiness. You understand

that I have not been running my head into the lion's den in entering the château myself, as my imprudent friend has done. I came at once to the out-buildings, and I succeeded in getting a letter conveyed to you; and now, Mademoiselle, for Heaven's sake, relieve me from my anxiety."—"There will be no difficulty in that, my dear M. Manicamp; your friend De Guiche has been admirably received."—"Bah!"—"The king gave him a warm reception."—"The king, who exiled him!"—"Madame smiled upon him, and Monsieur appears to like him better than ever."

"Ah!" said Manicamp, "that explains to me, then, why and how he has remained. And did he not say anything about me?"—"Not a word."—"That is very unkind. What is he doing now?"—"In all probability he is asleep; or if not asleep, he is dreaming."—"And what have they been doing all the evening?"—"Dancing."—"The famous ballet? How was De Guiche?"—"Superb."

"Dear fellow! And now, pray forgive me, Mademoiselle; but all that I now have to do is to pass from where I now am to your apartment."—"What do you mean?"—"I cannot suppose that the door of the château will be opened for me at this hour; and as for spending the night upon this branch, I possibly might not object to do so, but I declare the thing to be impossible for any other animal than a popinjay."—"But, M. Manicamp, I cannot introduce a man over the wall in that manner."—"Two, Mademoiselle," said a second voice, but in so timid a tone that it seemed as if its owner felt the utter impropriety of such a request.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Montalais, peering at the foot of the chestnut-tree, "who is that speaking to me?"—"I, Mademoiselle."—"Who are you?"—"Malicorne, your very humble servant;" and as he spoke, he raised himself from the ground to the lowest branches, and thence to the top of the wall.

"M. Malicorne! Gracious heavens! why, you are both mad!"—"How do you do, Mademoiselle?" inquired Malicorne, with great civility.

"I needed but this!" exclaimed Montalais, in despair.—"Oh, Mademoiselle," murmured Malicorne, "do not be so severe, I beseech you!"—"In fact, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, "we are your friends, and you cannot possibly wish your friends to lose their lives; and to leave us to pass the night where we are is in fact condemning us both to death."—"Oh," said

Montalais, "M. Malicorne is so robust that a night passed in the open air with the beautiful stars above him will not do him any harm, and it will be a just punishment for the trick he has played me."

"Be it so, then! Let Malicorne arrange matters with you in the best way he can; I pass over," said Manicamp; and bending down the famous branch against which he had directed such bitter complaints, he succeeded, with the assistance of his hands and feet, in seating himself side by side with Montalais, who tried to push him back, while he endeavoured to maintain his position. This conflict, which lasted several seconds, had its picturesque side, which M. de Saint-Aignan certainly found entertaining. But Manicamp won, and having taken possession of the ladder placed his foot on it, and then gallantly offered his hand to his fair antagonist. While this was going on, Malicorne had installed himself in the chestnut-tree, in the very place Manicamp had just left, determining within himself to succeed him in the one which he now occupied. Manicamp and Montalais descended a few rounds of the ladder, Manicamp insisting, and Montalais laughing and objecting. Suddenly Malicorne's voice was heard in tones of entreaty: "I entreat you, Mademoiselle, not to leave me here. My position is very insecure, and I cannot, unaided, reach the other side of the wall without accident. It does not matter if Manicamp tears his clothes, for he can make use of M. de Guiche's wardrobe; but I shall not be able to use even those belonging to M. Manicamp, for they will be torn."

"My opinion," said Manicamp, without taking any notice of Malicorne's lamentations, "is that the best thing to be done is for me to go and look for De Guiche without delay; for by and by perhaps I may not be able to get to his apartments."—"That is my own opinion too," replied Montalais; "so go at once, M. Manicamp."—"A thousand thanks. Adieu, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, jumping to the ground; "your kindness cannot possibly be exceeded."—"Do not mention it, M. Manicamp; I am now going to get rid of M. Malicorne." Malicorne sighed. "Go, go!" continued Montalais.

Manicamp went away a few paces, but returning to the foot of the ladder, said, "By the by, Mademoiselle, which is the way to M. de Guiche's?"—"Ah, nothing is easier! You go along by the hedge until you reach a place where the paths cross."—"Yes."—"You will see four paths."—"Exactly."—"One of which you will take."—"Which of them?"—"That to the

right."—"To the right?"—"No,—to the left."—"The deuce!"—"No, no! wait a minute—"

"You do not seem to be quite sure. Think again, I beg you, Mademoiselle."—"You take the middle path."—"But there are four."—"So there are. All that I know is that one of the four paths leads straight to Madame's apartments; and with that one I am well acquainted."—"But M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments, I suppose?"—"No, indeed."—"Well, then, the path which leads to Madame's apartments is of no use to me, and I would willingly exchange it for that which leads to where M. de Guiche is lodging."

"Of course, and I know that as well; but as for indicating from where we are, it seems to be quite impossible."—"Well, then, Mademoiselle, let us suppose that I have succeeded in finding that fortunate path."—"In that case you are almost there; for you have nothing else to do but to cross the labyrinth."—"Nothing more than that? The deuce! so there is a labyrinth as well?"—"Yes, and complicated enough too; even in daylight one may sometimes be deceived. There are turnings and windings without end; in the first place, you must turn three times to the right, then twice to the left, then turn once—Stay! is it once or twice, though? At all events, when you get clear of the labyrinth you will see an avenue of sycamores; and this avenue leads straight to the pavilion in which M. de Guiche is lodging."

"Nothing could be more clearly indicated, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp; "and I have not the slightest doubt in the world that if I were to follow your directions I should lose my way immediately. I have therefore a slight service to ask of you."—"What may that be?"—"That you will offer me your arm and guide me yourself, like another—like another— I used to know mythology, Mademoiselle, but other important matters have made me forget it; pray, come with me, then?"—"And am I to be abandoned, then?" cried Malicorne.

"It is quite impossible, Monsieur," said Montalais to Manicamp; "I might be seen with you at such an hour, and then just think what would be said of me!"—"Your own conscience would acquit you, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, sententiously.

"Impossible, Monsieur, impossible!"—"In that case let me assist Malicorne to get down; he is a very intelligent fellow, and possesses a very keen scent. He will guide me; and if we lose ourselves, both of us will be lost, and the one will save the other. If we are together, and should be met by any one, we shall look

as if we had some matter of business in hand; while alone I should have the appearance either of a lover or of a robber. Come, Malicorne; here is the ladder."—"M. Malicorne," cried Montalais, "I forbid you to leave your tree, and that under pain of incurring my anger."

Malicorne had already stretched out one leg towards the top of the wall and sadly withdrawn it, when Manicamp said in a whisper, "Hush!"—"What's the matter?" inquired Montalais.—"I hear footsteps."—"Good heavens!" In fact, the fancied footsteps soon became a reality; the foliage was pushed aside, and De Saint-Aignan appeared with a smile on his lips and his hand stretched out towards them, taking every one by surprise in their particular position,—that is to say, Malicorne upon the tree with his head stretched out, Montalais upon the rounds of the ladder and clinging to it tightly, and Manicamp on the ground with his foot advanced ready to set off. "Ah, good-evening, Manicamp!" said the count. "I am glad to see you, my dear fellow; we missed you this evening, and a good many inquiries have been made about you. Mademoiselle de Montalais, your most obedient servant."

Montalais blushed. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, hiding her face in both her hands.—"Mademoiselle," said De Saint-Aignan, "pray reassure yourself. I know how entirely innocent you are, and I shall give a good account of you. Manicamp, do you follow me. The hedge, the cross-paths, and labyrinth,—I am well acquainted with them all; I will be your Ariadne. There, now! your mythological name is found at last."—"Perfectly true, Count."

"And take M. Malicorne away with you at the same time, Count," said Montalais.—"No, indeed," said Malicorne. "M. Manicamp has conversed with you as long as he liked, and now it is my turn, if you please, Mademoiselle. I, too, have a multitude of things to tell you about our future prospects."—"You hear," said the count, laughing; "stay with him, Mademoiselle! This is indeed a night for secrets;" and taking Manicamp's arm, the count led him rapidly away in the direction of the road which Montalais knew so well and indicated so badly. Montalais followed them with her eyes as long as she could perceive them.

CHAPTER CXXIV

HOW MALICORNE HAD BEEN TURNED OUT OF THE HOTEL OF THE BEAU PAON

WHILE Montalais was engaged in looking after the count and Manicamp, Malicorne had taken advantage of the young girl's attention being drawn away to render his position somewhat more tolerable; and when she turned round, she immediately noticed the change which had taken place in his position,—for he had seated himself, like a monkey, upon the wall, with his feet resting upon the top rounds of the ladder. The foliage of the wild vine and the honeysuckle curled round his head, making him look like a faun, while the twisted ivy branches represented tolerably well the cloven feet. As for Montalais, she required nothing to complete her resemblance to a dryad. "Well," she said, ascending another round of the ladder, "are you resolved to render me unhappy? Have you not persecuted me enough, tyrant that you are?"—"I a tyrant?" said Malicorne.

"Yes, you are always compromising me, M. Malicorne; you are a perfect monster of wickedness."—"I?"—"What have you to do with Fontainebleau? Is not Orléans your place of residence?"—"Do you ask me what I have to do here? I wanted to see you."—"Ah, great need of that!"

"Not so far as concerns yourself, perhaps, but most certainly so far as I am concerned. Mademoiselle, you know very well that I have left my home, and that for the future I have no other place of residence than that which you may happen to have. As you therefore are staying at Fontainebleau at the present moment, I have come to Fontainebleau." Montalais shrugged her shoulders. "You wished to see me, did you not?" she said. —"Of course."—"Very well, you have seen me, you are satisfied; so now go away."

"Oh, no!" said Malicorne; "I came to talk with you as well as to see you."—"Very well, we will talk by and by and in another place than this."—"By and by! Heaven only knows if I shall meet you by and by in another place. We shall never find a more favourable one than this."—"But I cannot this evening; at this moment I cannot."—"Why not?"—"Because a thousand things have happened to-night."—"Well, then, my affair will make a thousand and one."

"No, no; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is waiting for

me in our room to communicate something of the very greatest importance."—"How long has she been waiting?"—"For an hour at least."—"In that case," said Malicorne, tranquilly, "she will wait a few minutes longer."—"M. Malicorne," said Montalais, "you are forgetting yourself."—"That is to say that you are forgetting me, Mademoiselle, and that I am getting impatient at the part you make me play here, *mordieu!* For the last week, Mademoiselle, I have been prowling about among you all, and you have not deigned once to notice my presence here."

"Have you been prowling about here for a week, M. Malicorne?"—"Like a wolf; sometimes I have been burned by the fireworks, which have singed two of my wigs; at others, I have been completely drenched in the osiers by the evening damps or the spray from the fountains,—always half famished, always fatigued to death, with the view of a wall always before me, and the prospect of having to scale it perhaps. Upon my word, Mademoiselle, this is not the sort of life for any one to lead who is neither a squirrel nor a salamander nor an otter; and since you drive your inhumanity so far as to wish to make me renounce my condition as a man, I proclaim it openly. A man I am, *mordieu!* and a man I will remain, subject to superior orders."—"Well, then, tell me, what do you wish, what do you require, what do you demand?" said Montalais, in a submissive tone.

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not know that I was at Fontainebleau?"—"I—"—"Be frank."—"I suspected so."—"Well, then, could you not have contrived during the last week to have seen me once a day at least?"—"I have always been prevented, M. Malicorne."—"Fiddlestick!"—"Ask my companions, if you do not believe me."—"I shall ask no one to explain matters which I know better than any one."—"Compose yourself, M. Malicorne; things will change."—"They must, indeed."—"You know that whether I see you or not, I am thinking of you," said Montalais, in a coaxing tone of voice.

"Oh, you are thinking of me, are you? Well, and is there anything new?"—"What about?"—"About my post in Monsieur's household."—"Ah, my dear M. Malicorne, no one has ventured lately to approach his royal highness."—"Well, but now?"—"Now it is quite a different thing; since yesterday he has left off being jealous."—"Bah! and how has his jealousy subsided?"—"There has been a diversion."—"Tell me all about it."

"A report was spread that the king had fallen in love with some one else, and Monsieur was tranquillised immediately." —"And who spread the report?" Montalais lowered her voice. "Between ourselves," she said, "I think that Madame and the king have an understanding about it."—"Ah!" said Malicorne; "that was the only way to manage it. But what about poor M. de Guiche?"—"Oh, as for him, he is completely turned off!"—"Have they been writing to each other?"—"No, certainly not; I have not seen a pen in either of their hands for the last week."

"On what terms are you with Madame?"—"The very best." —"And with the king?"—"The king always smiles at me whenever I pass him."—"Good. Now tell me whom have the two lovers selected to serve for their screen?"—"La Vallière." —"Oh, oh, poor girl! We must prevent that, my dear."—"Why?"—"Because, if M. Raoul de Bragelonne were to suspect it, he would either kill her or kill himself."

"Raoul, poor fellow! do you think so?"—"Women pretend to have a knowledge of the state of people's affections," said Malicorne, "and they do not even know how to read the thoughts of their own minds. Well, I can tell you that M. de Bragelonne loves La Vallière to such a degree that if she pretended to deceive him, he would, I repeat, either kill himself or kill her." —"But the king is there to defend her," said Montalais.

"The king!" exclaimed Malicorne; "Raoul would kill the king as he would a Dutch dragoon."—"Good heavens!" said Montalais; "you are mad, M. Malicorne."—"Not in the least. Everything I have told you is, on the contrary, perfectly serious, my dear; and for my own part I know one thing."—"What is that?"—"That I shall quietly tell Raoul of the trick."

"Hush, you wretch!" said Montalais, ascending another round of the ladder, so as to approach Malicorne more closely; "do not open your lips to poor Bragelonne!"—"Why not?"—"Because as yet you know nothing at all."—"What is the matter, then?"—"Why, this evening— But no one is listening, I hope?"—"No."—"This evening, then, beneath the royal oak La Vallière said aloud, and innocently enough, these words, 'I cannot conceive that when one has seen the king, one can ever love another man.'"

Malicorne almost bounced off the wall. "Unhappy girl! did she really say that?"—"Word for word."—"And she thinks so?"—"La Vallière always thinks what she says."—

"That positively cries aloud for vengeance. Why, women are serpents!" said Malicorne.

"Compose yourself, my dear Malicorne, compose yourself."—"No, no; let us strike at the roots of the evil, on the contrary. Let us warn Raoul; it is time."—"Blunderer! on the contrary, it is too late," replied Montalais.

"How so?"—"La Vallière's remark, which was intended for the king, reached its destination."—"The king knows it, then? The king was told of it, I suppose?"—"The king heard it."—"*Ohimé!* as the cardinal used to say."—"The king was in the thicket close to the royal oak."—"It follows, then," said Malicorne, "that for the future the plan which the king and Madame have arranged will go as easily as if it were on wheels, and will pass over poor Bragelonne's body."—"Precisely so."—"It is terrible!"—"So it is."

"Upon my word," said Malicorne, after a moment's silence devoted to meditation, "do not let us interpose our poor selves between a large oak-tree and a great king, for we should certainly be ground to pieces."—"The very thing I was going to say to you."—"Let us think of ourselves, then."—"My own idea."—"Open your beautiful eyes, then."—"And you your large ears."—"Approach your little mouth for a good big kiss."—"Here," said Montalais, who paid the debt immediately in ringing coin.

"Now let us consider. First, we have M. de Guiche, who is in love with Madame; then La Vallière, who is in love with the king; next, the king, who is in love both with Madame and La Vallière; lastly, Monsieur, who loves no one but himself. Among all these loves a noodle would make his fortune; a greater reason, therefore, for sensible people like ourselves to do so."—"There you are with your dreams again!"—"Nay, rather with my realities. Let yourself be led by me, darling. You have not been very badly off hitherto, have you?"—"No."

"Well, the future will agree with the past. Only, since all here think of themselves before anything else, let us do so too."—"Perfectly right."—"But of ourselves only."—"Be it so."—"An offensive and defensive alliance."—"I am ready to swear it."—"Put out your hand, then, and say, 'All for Malicorne.'"—"All for Malicorne."—"And I 'All for Montalais,'" responded Malicorne, stretching out his hand in his turn.

"And now what is to be done!"—"Keep your eyes and ears constantly open; collect every means of attack which may be

serviceable against others; never let anything lie about which can be used against ourselves."—"Agreed."—"Decided."—"Sworn to; and now that the agreement is entered into, good-bye."

"What do you mean by 'good-bye'?"—"Of course you can now return to your inn."—"To my inn?"—"Yes; are you not lodging at the sign of the Beau Paon?"—"Montalais, Montalais! you now see that you were aware of my being at Fontainebleau."—"Well, and what does that prove except that I occupied myself about you more than you deserve, ingrate?"—"Hum!"

"Go back, then, to the Beau Paon."—"That is now quite out of the question."—"Have you not a room there?"—"I had, but I have it no longer."—"You have it no longer? and who has taken it from you?"

"I will tell you. Some little time ago I was returning there, after I had been running about after you; and having reached my hotel quite out of breath, I perceived a litter, upon which four peasants were carrying a sick monk."—"A monk?"—"Yes, an old grey-bearded Franciscan. As I was looking at this sick monk, they entered the hotel; and as they were carrying him up the staircase, I followed; and as I reached the top of the staircase, I observed that they took him into my room."—"Into your room?"—"Yes, into my own apartment. Supposing it to be a mistake, I summoned the landlord, who says that the room which had been let to me for the past eight days was let to the Franciscan for the ninth."—"Oh! oh!"

"That was exactly what I said; nay, I did even more, for I was inclined to get out of temper. I went upstairs again; I spoke to the Franciscan himself, and wished to prove to him the impropriety of his step, when this monk, dying though he seemed to be, raised himself upon his arm, fixed a pair of blazing eyes upon me, and in a voice which was admirably suited to command a charge of cavalry, said, 'Turn this fellow out of doors!' which order was immediately executed by the landlord and the four porters, who made me descend the staircase somewhat faster than was agreeable. This is how it happens, dearest, that I have no lodging."

"Who can this Franciscan be?" said Montalais. "Is he a general?"—"Precisely; it seems to me that that is the title which one of the porters gave him as he spoke to him in a low tone."—"So that—" said Montalais.

"So that I have no room, no hotel, no lodging; and I am as

determined as my friend Manicamp was just now, not to pass the night in the open air."—"What is to be done, then?" said Montalais.

"Nothing easier," said a third voice, whereupon Montalais and Malicorne uttered a simultaneous cry, and De Saint-Aignan appeared. "Dear M. Malicorne," said De Saint-Aignan, "a very lucky accident has brought me back to extricate you from your embarrassment. Come, I can offer you a room in my own apartments, of which I can assure you no Franciscan will deprive you. As for you, my dear young lady, be easy! I already knew Mademoiselle de la Vallière's secret and that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; your own you have just been kind enough to confide to me, for which I thank you. I can keep three quite as well as one only." Malicorne and Montalais looked at each other, like two children detected in a theft; but as Malicorne saw a great advantage in the proposition which had been made to him, he gave Montalais a sign of resignation, which she returned. Malicorne then descended the ladder, round by round, reflecting at every step upon the means of obtaining piecemeal from M. de Saint-Aignan all he might possibly know about the famous secret. Montalais had already darted away as fleet as a deer, and neither cross-road nor labyrinth was able to mislead her. As for De Saint Aignan, he carried off Malicorne with him to his apartments, showing him a thousand attentions, enchanted to have close at hand the very two men who, supposing that De Guiche were to remain silent, could give him the best information about the maids of honour.

CHAPTER CXXV

WHAT ACTUALLY DID OCCUR AT THE INN CALLED THE BEAU PAON

In the first place, let us supply our readers with a few details about the inn called the Beau Paon; then we will pass to the description of the travellers who were residing there. The inn of the Beau Paon, like every inn, owed its name to its sign; and this represented a peacock spreading out its tail. But in imitation of some painters who had bestowed the face of a handsome young man upon the serpent which tempted Eve, the painter of this sign had conferred upon the "beautiful peacock" the features of a woman. This inn—a living epigram

against that half of the human race which renders existence delightful, as M. Legouvé says—was situated at Fontainebleau, in the first turning on the left-hand side, which divides on the road from Paris that large artery which constitutes in itself alone the entire town of Fontainebleau. The side street in question was then known as the Rue de Lyon, doubtless because, geographically, it advanced in the direction of the second capital of the kingdom. On the street itself were two houses occupied by tradespeople, the houses being separated by two large gardens bordered with hedges. Apparently, however, there were three houses in the street. Let us explain how, notwithstanding appearances, there were only two.

The inn of the Beau Paon had its principal front towards the main street; but upon the Rue de Lyon there were two ranges of buildings divided by courtyards, which comprised sets of apartments for the reception of all classes of travellers, whether on foot or on horseback, or even with their own carriages; and in which could be supplied, not only board and lodging, but also accommodation for exercise and solitude for the wealthiest courtiers, whenever after having received some check at the court they wished to shut themselves up with their own society, either to swallow an affront or to brood over their revenge. From the windows of this back part of the building the travellers could perceive, in the first place, the street with the grass growing between the stones, which were being gradually loosened by it; next, the beautiful hedges of elder and thorn, which embraced, as though within two green and flowering arms, the citizens' houses of which we have spoken; and then, in the spaces between those houses, forming the groundwork of the picture, and appearing like an almost impassable barrier, a line of thick trees, the advanced sentinels of the vast forest which extends itself in front of Fontainebleau. It was therefore easy, provided one secured an apartment at the angle of the building, to obtain by the main street from Paris a view of the passers-by and the festivities as well as to hear them, and by the Rue de Lyon to look upon and to enjoy the calm of the country; and this without reckoning that in cases of urgent necessity, at the very moment when people might be knocking at the principal door in the Rue de Paris, one could make one's escape by the little door in the Rue de Lyon, and creeping along the gardens of the private houses attain the outskirts of the forest.

Malicorne, who it will be remembered was the first to bring to our notice this inn, in deploring his being turned out of it,

having been absorbed in his own affairs, was far from having told Montalais all that could be said about this curious inn; and we will try to repair Malicorne's grievous omission. He had not thought to tell, for instance, in what way he had gained admission into this inn; and moreover, with the exception of the few words he had said about the Franciscan friar, he had not given any particulars about the travellers who were staying there. The manner in which they had arrived, the manner in which they lived, the difficulty which existed for every one but certain privileged travellers in entering the hotel without a password and in living there without certain preparatory precautions, must have struck Malicorne, and we will venture to say really did so. But Malicorne, as we have already said, had some personal matters of his own to occupy his attention, which prevented his paying much attention to others. In fact, all the apartments of the hotel were engaged and retained by certain strangers, who never went out, who were incommunicative in their address, whose countenances were full of thoughtful occupation, and not one of whom was known to Malicorne. Every one of these travellers had arrived at the hotel since his own arrival there. Each man had gained entrance by giving a kind of password, which had at first attracted Malicorne's attention; but having inquired in an indirect manner about it, he had been informed that the host had given as a reason for this extreme vigilance, that, as the town was so full of wealthy noblemen, it must also be as full of clever and zealous pickpockets. The reputation of an honest inn like that of the Beau Paon was concerned in not allowing its visitors to be robbed. It occasionally happened, also, that Malicorne asked himself, as he thought matters carefully over in his mind and reflected upon his own position in the inn, how it was that they had allowed him to become an inmate of the hotel, while he had observed since his residence there admission refused to so many. He asked himself, too, how it was that when Manicamp, who in his opinion must be a man to be looked upon with veneration by everybody, wished to bait his horse at the Beau Paon, on arriving there both horse and rider had been turned away with a *nescio vos* of the most positive character. All this for Malicorne, whose mind was fully occupied by his own love-affair and his personal ambition, was a problem he had not applied himself to solve. Had he wished to do so, we should hardly venture to say, notwithstanding the intelligence we have attributed to him, that he would have succeeded.

A few words will prove to the reader that nothing less than Œdipus in person could have solved the enigma in question. During the week seven travellers had taken up their abode in the inn, all of them having arrived there the day after the fortunate day on which Malicorne had fixed his choice on the Beau Paon. These seven persons, accompanied by a suitable retinue, were the following:—First of all, a brigadier in the German army, his secretary, physician, three servants, and seven horses. The brigadier's name was the Comte von Wostpur. A Spanish cardinal, with two nephews, two secretaries, an officer of his household, and twelve horses. The cardinal's name was Monseigneur Herrebia. A rich merchant of Bremen, with his manservant and his horses. This merchant's name was Meinheer Bonstett. A Venetian senator, with his wife and daughter, both extremely beautiful. The senator's name was Signor Marini. A Scotch laird, with seven Highlanders of his clan, all on foot. The laird's name was MacCumnor. An Austrian from Vienna, without title or coat-of-arms, who had arrived in a carriage,—a good deal of the priest, and something of the soldier. He was called "the Councillor." And finally, a Flemish lady, with a manservant, a lady's-maid, and a female companion, a large retinue, great display, and immense horses. She was called "the Flemish lady."

All these travellers had arrived on the same day, we have said; and yet their arrival had occasioned no confusion in the inn, no stoppage in the street. Their apartments had been fixed upon beforehand, by the order of their couriers or their secretaries, who had arrived the previous evening or the same morning. Malicorne, who had arrived the previous day, riding an ill-conditioned horse, with a slender valise, had announced himself at the hotel of the Beau Paon as the friend of a nobleman desirous of witnessing the festivities, and who would himself arrive almost immediately. The landlord, on hearing these words, had smiled as if he were perfectly well acquainted either with Malicorne or with his friend the nobleman, and had said to him, "Since you are the first arrival, Monsieur, choose what apartment you please." This was said with that obsequiousness of manners, so full of meaning with landlords, which means: "Make yourself perfectly easy, Monsieur; we know with whom we have to do, and you will be treated accordingly." These words, with their accompanying gesture, Malicorne had thought very friendly, but rather obscure. However, as he did not wish to be very extravagant in his expenses, and as he thought that

if he were to ask for a small apartment he would doubtless have been refused on account of his want of consequence, he hastened to close at once with the innkeeper's remark, and deceive him with a cunning equal to his own. So, smiling like a man for whom whatever might be done was but simply his due, he said, "My dear host, I shall take the best and the gayest room in the house."—"With a stable?"—"Yes, with a stable."—"And when will you take it?"—"Immediately, if it be possible."—"Quite so."—"But," Malicorne hastened to add, "I shall leave the large room unoccupied for the present."—"Very good!" said the landlord, with an air of much intelligence.

"Certain reasons, which you will understand by and by, oblige me to take, at my own cost, only this small room."—"Yes, yes," said the host.—"When my friend arrives, he will occupy the large apartment; and as a matter of course, as this large apartment will be his own affair, he will settle for it himself."—"Certainly," said the landlord, "certainly; it was so understood."

"It was so understood?"—"Word for word."—"It is extraordinary," murmured Malicorne. "You quite understand, then?"—"Yes."—"There is nothing more to be said. Since, then, you understand—for you do clearly understand, do you not?—"—"Perfectly."—"Very well, you may show me to my room."

The landlord, cap in hand, preceded Malicorne, who installed himself in his room, and became more and more surprised to observe that the landlord at every ascent or descent looked and winked at him in a manner which indicated the best possible intelligence between them. "There is some mistake here," said Malicorne to himself; "but until it is cleared up, I shall take the advantage of it, which is the best thing I can possibly do;" and he darted out of his room like a hunting-dog following up a scent, in search of all the news and curiosities of the court, getting himself burned in one place and drowned in another, as he had told Mademoiselle de Montalais. The day after he had been installed in his room he had noticed the seven travellers arrive one after the other, filling the whole hotel. At the sight of all those people, of all those carriages, of all that retinue, Malicorne rubbed his hands delightedly, thinking that one day later he should not have found a bed to lie upon after his return from his exploring expeditions. When all the travellers were lodged, the landlord entered Malicorne's room, and with his accustomed courteousness said to him, "You are aware, my

dear Monsieur, that the large room in the third detached building is still reserved for you? "—"Of course I am aware of it."—"I am really making you a present of it."—"Thank you."—"So that when your friend comes—"—"Well!"—"He will be satisfied with me, I hope: or if he be not, he will be very difficult to please."

"Excuse me, but will you allow me to say a few words about my friend?"—"Of course, for you have a perfect right to do so."—"He intended to come, as you know."—"And he does so still."—"He may possibly have changed his intention."—"No."—"You are quite sure, then?"—"Quite sure."—"But in case you should have some doubt."—"Well!"—"I can only say that I do not positively assure you that he will come."

"Yet he told you—"—"He certainly did tell me. But you know that 'Man proposes but God disposes;' *verba volant, scripta manent.*"—"Which is as much as to say—"—"That what is spoken flies away, and what is written remains; and as he did not write to me, but contented himself by saying to me, 'I will authorise you, yet without specially inviting you,' you must feel that it places me in a very embarrassing position."

"What do you authorise me to do, then?"—"Why, to let your rooms if you find a good tenant for them."—"I?"—"Yes, you."—"Never will I do such a thing, Monsieur! If he has not written to you, he has written to me."—"Ah, what does he say? Let us see if his letter agrees with his words."—"These are almost his very words:—

"'To the Landlord of the Beau Paon Hotel,—You will have been informed of the meeting arranged to take place in your hotel between some persons of importance; I shall be one of those who will assemble at Fontainebleau. Keep for me, then, a small room for a friend who will arrive either before or after me—'

And you are the friend, I suppose," said the landlord, interrupting his reading of the letter. Malicorne bowed modestly. The landlord resumed:—

"'And a large apartment for myself. The large apartment is my own affair; but I wish the price of the smaller room to be moderate, as it is destined for a fellow who is deucedly poor.'

It is still you of whom he is speaking, is it not?" said the host.—"Oh, certainly!" said Malicorne.

"Then we are agreed; your friend will settle for his apart-

ment, and you for your own."—"May I be broken alive upon the wheel," said Malicorne to himself, "if I understand anything at all about it!" And then he said aloud, "Well, then, are you satisfied with the name?"—"With what name?"—"With the name at the end of the letter. Does it give you the guarantee you require?"—"I was going to ask you his name," said the host.

"What! was not the letter signed?"—"No," said the host, opening his eyes very wide, full of mystery and curiosity.—"In that case," replied Malicorne, imitating his gesture and his mysterious look,—"if he has not given you his name, you understand, he must have his reasons for it."—"Oh, of course!"—"And therefore that I, his friend, his confidant, must not betray his incognito."—"You are perfectly right, Monsieur," replied the landlord, "and therefore I do not insist upon it."

"I appreciate your delicacy. As for myself, as my friend told you, my room is a separate affair; so let us come to terms about it. Short accounts make good friends, you know. How much is it?"—"There is no hurry."—"Never mind,—let us reckon it up, all the same: room, my own board, a place in the stable for my horse, and his feed. How much per day?"—"Four livres, Monsieur."—"Which will make twelve livres for the three days I have been here?"—"Twelve livres,—yes, Monsieur."—"Here are your twelve livres, then."

"But why settle now, Monsieur?"—"Because," said Malicorne, lowering his voice and resorting to his former air of mystery, seeing that mystery helped him on,—"because if I had to set off suddenly, to decamp at any moment, my account would be already settled."—"You are right, Monsieur."—"I may consider myself at home, then?"—"Perfectly."—"So far, so good. Adieu!" and the landlord withdrew. Malicorne, left alone, reasoned with himself in the following manner: "No one but M. de Guiche or Manicamp could have written to mine host,—M. de Guiche, because he wishes to secure a lodging for himself beyond the precincts of the court, in the event of his success or failure, as the case may be; Manicamp, because M. de Guiche may have entrusted him with his commission. And M. de Guiche or Manicamp will have argued in this manner: the large apartment to receive in a befitting manner a lady very thickly veiled, affording to the lady in question a second means of exit,—into a street somewhat deserted and closely adjoining the forest; the smaller room either to shelter Manicamp for a

time, who is M. de Guiche's confidant and would be the vigilant keeper of the door, or for M. de Guiche himself, acting for greater safety the part of master and that of confidant at the same time. Yet," he continued, "how about this meeting which is to take place, and which indeed has actually taken place, in this hotel? No doubt they are persons who are going to be presented to the king. And the 'poor devil' for whom the smaller room is destined is a trick, in order the better to conceal De Guiche or Manicamp. If this be the case,—as very likely it is,—there is only half the mischief done; for there is simply the length of one's purse-strings between Manicamp and Malicorne."

After he had thus reasoned the matter out, Malicorne had slept soundly, leaving the seven strangers to occupy, and to survey in every sense of the word, their several lodgings in the hotel. Whenever there was nothing at court to disquiet him, when he was weary of excursions and investigations, and of writing letters which he could never find an opportunity of delivering according to their address, he then returned home to his comfortable little room, and leaning upon the balcony, which was filled with nasturtiums and white pinks, Malicorne began to think over these strange travellers, for whom Fontainebleau seemed to possess no attractions in its illuminations or amusements or *fêtes*. Things went on in this manner until the seventh day,—a day of which we have given such full details, with its night also, in the preceding chapters. On that night Malicorne was enjoying the fresh air, seated at his window, towards one o'clock in the morning, when Manicamp appeared on horseback with a thoughtful and listless air. "Good!" said Malicorne to himself, recognising him at the first glance; "there's my friend who has come to take possession of his apartment,—that is to say, of my room;" and he called to Manicamp, who looked up and immediately recognised Malicorne.

"Ah, by Jove!" said the former, his countenance clearing up; "glad to see you, Malicorne! I have been wandering about Fontainebleau, looking for three things I cannot find,—De Guiche, a room, and a stable."—"Of M. de Guiche I cannot give you either good or bad news, for I have not seen him; but so far as concerns your room and a stable, that's another matter, for they have been retained here for you."—"Retained,—and by whom?"—"By yourself, I suppose."—"By me?"—"Do you mean to say that you have not engaged lodgings here?"—"By no means!" said Manicamp.

At this moment the landlord appeared in the doorway. "I require a room," said Manicamp.

"Have you engaged one, Monsieur?"—"No."—"Then I have no rooms to let."—"In that case I have engaged a room," said Manicamp.—"A room simply, or lodgings?"—"Anything you please."—"By letter?" inquired the landlord. Malicorne nodded affirmatively to Manicamp. "Of course by letter," said Manicamp. "Did you not receive a letter from me?"

"What was the date of the letter?" inquired the host, in whom Manicamp's hesitation had aroused suspicion. Manicamp scratched his ear, and looked up at Malicorne's window; but Malicorne had left his window and was coming down the stairs to his friend's assistance. At the very same moment a traveller wrapped up in a long Spanish cloak appeared at the porch, near enough to hear the conversation. "I ask you what was the date of the letter you wrote to me to retain apartments here?" repeated the landlord, again pressing his question.

"Last Wednesday was the date," said the mysterious stranger, in a soft and polished tone of voice, touching the landlord on the shoulder. Manicamp drew back; and it was now Malicorne's turn, who appeared on the threshold, to scratch his ear.

The landlord saluted the new arrival as a man who recognises his true guest. "Monsieur," he said to him with civility, "your apartment is ready for you, and the stables too; only—" He looked round him, and inquired. "Your horses?"—"My horses may or may not arrive. That, however, matters but little to you, provided you are paid for what has been engaged." The landlord bowed still lower. "You have," continued the unknown traveller, "kept for me, besides, the small room for which I asked you."—"Oh!" said Malicorne, endeavouring to hide himself.

"Monsieur, your friend has occupied it during the last week," said the landlord, pointing to Malicorne, who was trying to make himself as small as possible. The traveller, drawing his cloak round him so as to cover the lower part of his face, cast a rapid glance at Malicorne, and said, "This gentleman is no friend of mine."

The landlord almost started off his feet. "I am not acquainted with this gentleman," continued the traveller.—"What!" exclaimed the host, turning to Malicorne, "are you not this gentleman's friend, then?"—"What does it matter whether I am or not, provided you are paid?" said Malicorne, parodying the stranger's remark in a very majestic manner.

"It matters so far as this," said the landlord, who began to perceive that one person had been taken for another, "that I beg you, Monsieur, to leave the rooms, which had been engaged beforehand, and by some other person than you."—"Still," said Malicorne, "this gentleman cannot require at the same time a room on the first floor and an apartment on the second. If this gentleman will take the room, I will take the apartment; if he prefers the apartment, I will keep the room."—"I am exceedingly distressed, Monsieur," said the traveller, in his soft voice; "but I need both the room and the apartment."—"At least, tell me for whom?" inquired Malicorne.

"The apartment I require for myself."—"Very well; but the room?"—"Look!" said the traveller, pointing towards a sort of procession which was approaching. Malicorne looked in the direction indicated, and observed, borne upon a litter, the arrival of the Franciscan, whose installation in his own room he had, with a few details of his own, related to Montalais, and whom he had so uselessly endeavoured to convert to humbler views. The result of the arrival of the unknown traveller and of the sick Franciscan was Malicorne's expulsion, without any consideration for his feelings, from the inn of the Beau Paon by the landlord and the peasants who had carried the Franciscan. The details of what followed this expulsion have already been given, — of Manicamp's conversation with Montalais; how Manicamp, with greater cleverness than Malicorne had shown, had succeeded in obtaining news of De Guiche; of the subsequent conversation of Montalais with Malicorne; and, finally, of the lodgings with which the Comte de Saint-Aignan had furnished Manicamp and Malicorne. It remains for us to inform our readers who were the traveller with the cloak—the principal tenant of the double apartment of which Malicorne had only occupied a portion—and the Franciscan, quite as mysterious a personage, whose arrival, together with that of the stranger with the cloak, had been unfortunate enough to upset the two friends' plans.

CHAPTER CXXVI

A JESUIT OF THE ELEVENTH YEAR

In the first place, in order not to weary the reader's patience, we will hasten to answer the first question. The traveller with the cloak held over his face was Aramis, who after he had left Fouquet and had taken from a portmanteau which his servant had opened a cavalier's complete costume, had quitted the château, and had gone to the hotel of the Beau Paon, where by letter, seven or eight days previous, he had, as the landlord had stated, directed a room and an apartment to be retained for him.

Immediately after Malicorne and Manicamp had been turned out, Aramis approached the Franciscan, and asked him whether he would prefer the apartment or the room. The Franciscan inquired where they were both situated. He was told that the room was on the first floor, and the apartment on the second. "The room, then," he said. Aramis did not contradict him, but with great submissiveness said to the landlord, "The room;" and bowing with respect he withdrew into the apartment, and the Franciscan was accordingly carried at once into the room. Now, is it not extraordinary that this respect should be shown by a prelate of the church for a simple monk,—for one, too, belonging to a mendicant order,—to whom was thus given up, without a request for it even, a room which so many travellers were desirous of obtaining? How, too, was to be explained this unexpected arrival of Aramis at the hotel of the Beau Paon, when he had entered the château with M. Fouquet, and could have remained at the château with M. Fouquet if he had liked?

The Franciscan supported his removal up the staircase without uttering a complaint, although it was evident that he suffered very much, and that every time the litter was knocked against the wall or against the railing of the staircase he experienced a terrible shock throughout his frame; and finally, when he had arrived in the room, he said to those who carried him, "Help me to place myself in that arm-chair." The bearers of the litter placed it on the ground, and lifting the sick man as gently as possible, carried him to the chair he had indicated, which was placed at the head of the bed. "Now," he added, with a marked benignity of gesture and tone, "desire the landlord to come up." The men obeyed, and five minutes after-

wards the landlord appeared at the door. "My friend," said the Franciscan to him, "be kind enough to send these good fellows away; they are vassals of the Vicomte de Melun. They found me when, overcome by the heat, I had fainted on the road, and without thinking whether they would be paid for their trouble, they wished to carry me to their own homes. But I know at what cost to themselves is the hospitality which the poor extend to a sick man, and I preferred this hotel, where moreover I was expected."

The landlord looked at the Franciscan in amazement; but the latter with his thumb made the sign of the cross in a peculiar manner upon his breast. The host replied by making a similar sign on his left shoulder. "Yes, indeed," he said, "we did expect you, my father, but we hoped that you would arrive in a better state of health." As the peasants were looking with astonishment at the innkeeper, usually so supercilious, and saw how respectful he had become all of a sudden in the presence of a poor monk, the Franciscan drew from a deep pocket two or three pieces of gold, which he held out. "My friends," said he, "here is something to repay you for the care you have taken of me. So make yourselves perfectly easy, and do not be afraid of leaving me here. The order to which I belong, and for which I am travelling, does not wish me to beg; and as the attention you have shown me deserves to be rewarded, take these two louis and depart in peace."

The peasants did not dare to take them. The landlord took the two louis from the monk's hand, and placed them in that of one of the peasants, all four of whom withdrew, opening their eyes wider than ever. The door was then closed; and while the innkeeper stood respectfully near it, the Franciscan collected himself for a moment. He then passed across his sallow face a hand which seemed dried up by fever, and rubbed his nervous and trembling fingers across his grizzly beard. His large eyes, hollowed by sickness and anxiety, seemed to pursue in the vague distance a mournful and fixed idea. "What physicians have you at Fontainebleau?" the Franciscan inquired, after a long pause.

"We have three, my father."—"What are their names?"—"Luiniguet, first."—"The next one?"—"A brother of the Carmelite order, named Brother Hubert."—"The next?"—"A secular member, named Grisart."—"Ah! Grisart?" murmured the monk. "Send for M. Grisart immediately."

The landlord moved in prompt obedience to the direction.

"Tell me, what priests are there near here?"—"What priests?"—"Yes, belonging to what orders?"—"There are Jesuits, Augustines, and Cordeliers; but the Jesuits are the nearest. Shall I send for a Jesuit confessor?"—"Yes, immediately." The landlord went out.

It will be imagined that at the sign of the cross which they had exchanged the landlord and the invalid monk had recognised each other as two affiliated members of the formidable Society of Jesus. Left to himself, the Franciscan drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, some of which he read over with the most careful attention. The violence of his disorder, however, overcame his courage; his eyes rolled in their sockets, a cold sweat poured down his face, and he nearly fainted, and lay with his head thrown back and his arms hanging down on both sides of his chair. For more than five minutes he remained without any movement, when the landlord returned, bringing with him the physician, whom he had hardly allowed time to dress himself. The noise which they made in entering the room, the current of air which the opening of the door had occasioned, restored the sick man to his senses. He hurriedly seized hold of his scattered papers, and with his long and meagre hand concealed them under the cushions of the chair. The landlord went out of the room, leaving patient and physician together.

"Come here, M. Grisart," said the Franciscan to the doctor; "approach closer, for there is no time to be lost. Examine me, consider, and pronounce your sentence."—"The landlord," replied the physician, "told me that I had the honour of attending an affiliated brother."—"Yes," replied the Franciscan, "it is so. Tell me the truth, then. I feel very ill, and think that I am going to die." The physician took the monk's hand and felt his pulse. "Oh!" he said, "a dangerous fever."

"What do you call a dangerous fever?" inquired the patient, with an imperious look.—"To an affiliated member of the first or second year," replied the physician, looking inquiringly at the monk, "I should say—a fever that may be cured."—"But to me?" said the Franciscan. The physician hesitated. "Look at my grey hair, and my forehead, full of anxious thought," he continued; "look at the lines in my face, by which I reckon up the trials I have undergone. I am a Jesuit of the eleventh year, M. Grisart."

The physician started; for, in fact, a Jesuit of the eleventh year was one of those men who had been initiated in all the secrets of the order,—one of those for whom the science has no

more secrets, the society no further barriers to present, temporal obedience no more trammels. "In that case," said Grisart, saluting him with respect, "I am in the presence of a master?"

"Yes; act, therefore, accordingly."—"And you wish to know—"—"My real state."—"Well," said the physician, "it is a brain fever, otherwise called acute meningitis, which has reached its highest degree of intensity."—"There is no hope, then?" asked the Franciscan, briefly.

"I do not say that," replied the doctor; "yet, considering the disordered state of the brain, the hurried respiration, the rapidity of the pulse, and the burning nature of the fever which is devouring you—"—"And which has thrice prostrated me since this morning," said the friar.

"Therefore I should call it a dangerous attack. But why did you not stop on the road?"—"I was expected here, and I was obliged to come."—"Even at the risk of your life?"—"Yes, at the risk of dying!"—"Very well; considering all the symptoms of your case, I must tell you that your condition is almost desperate."

The Franciscan smiled in a strange manner. "What you have just told me is perhaps sufficient for what is due to an affiliated member, even of the eleventh year; but for what is due to me, M. Grisart, it is too little, and I have a right to demand more. Come, then, let us be more candid still, and as frank as if we were making our confession to Heaven. Besides, I have already sent for a confessor."—"Oh! I hope, however," murmured the doctor.

"Answer me," said the sick man, displaying with a dignified gesture a golden ring, the stone of which had until that moment been turned inside, and which bore engraved thereon the distinguishing mark of the Society of Jesus. Grisart uttered a loud exclamation. "The general!" he cried.

"Silence!" said the Franciscan; "you now understand that the truth is everything."—"Monseigneur, Monseigneur," murmured Grisart, "send for the confessor; for in two hours, at the next seizure, you will be attacked by delirium, and will pass away in the course of it."—"Very well," said the patient, for a moment contracting his eyebrows; "I have still two hours to live, then?"—"Yes; particularly if you take the potion I shall send you presently."—"And that will give me two hours more?"—"Two hours."—"I would take it, were it poison; for those two hours are necessary not only for myself, but for the

glory of the order."—"What a loss, what a catastrophe for us all!" murmured the physician.

"It is the loss of one man, that is all," replied the Franciscan; "and Heaven will enable the poor monk who is about to leave you, to find a worthy successor. Adieu, M. Grisart; it is a boon from Heaven, indeed, that I have met you. A physician who had not been one of our holy congregation would have left me in ignorance of my condition; and relying on a few days more of existence, I should not have taken the necessary precautions. You are a learned man, M. Grisart, and that confers an honour upon us all; it would have been repugnant to my feelings to have found one of our order of little standing in his profession. Adieu, M. Grisart! send me the cordial immediately."—"Give me your blessing, at least, Monseigneur."—"In my mind I do; go, go!—in my mind I do so, I tell you,—*animo*, M. Grisart, *viribus impossibile;*" and he again fell back in the arm-chair, almost fainting again. M. Grisart hesitated whether he should give him immediate assistance, or should run to prepare the cordial he had promised. He doubtless decided in favour of the cordial, for he darted out of the room and disappeared down the staircase.

CHAPTER CXXVII

THE STATE SECRET

A FEW moments after Dr. Grisart's departure, the confessor arrived. He had hardly crossed the threshold of the door when the Franciscan fixed a penetrating look upon him, and shaking his head murmured, "A weak mind, I see; may Heaven forgive me for dying without the help of this living piece of human infirmity!" The confessor, on his side, regarded the dying man with astonishment, almost with terror. He had never beheld eyes so burningly bright at the very moment when they were about to close, nor looks so terrible when they were about to be quenched in death. The Franciscan made a rapid and imperious sign with his hand. "Sit down there, my father," he said, "and listen to me!" The Jesuit confessor—a good and simple priest, a recently initiated member of the order, who had seen only the beginning of its mysteries—yielded to the superiority assumed by the penitent. "There are several persons staying in this hostelry," continued the Franciscan.

"But," inquired the Jesuit, "I thought that I had been summoned to receive confession. Is your remark, then, a confession?"—"Why do you ask me?"—"In order to know whether I am to keep your words secret."—"My remarks are part of my confession; I confide them to you in your character of a confessor."—"Very well," said the priest, installing himself in the chair which the Franciscan had with great difficulty just left in order to lie down on the bed.

The Franciscan continued: "I repeat, there are several persons staying in this inn."—"So I have heard."—"They ought to be eight in number." The Jesuit made a sign that he understood him. "The first to whom I wish to speak," said the dying man, "is a German from Vienna, whose name is the Baron von Wostpur. Be kind enough to go and find him, and tell him that the person he expected has arrived."

The confessor, astounded, looked at his penitent; the confession seemed a singular one. "Obey!" said the Franciscan, in a tone of command impossible to resist. The good Jesuit, completely subdued, rose and left the room. As soon as he had gone, the Franciscan again took up the papers which a crisis of the fever had already once before obliged him to put aside. "The Baron von Wostpur? Good!" he said; "ambitious, a fool, and straitened in his means." The monk folded up the papers, which he thrust under his pillow. Rapid footsteps were heard at the end of the corridor. The confessor returned, followed by the Baron von Wostpur, who walked along with his head raised, as though it were incumbent upon him to break through the ceiling with the feather in his hat. Therefore, upon seeing the Franciscan with his melancholy look, and the plainness of the room, he stopped and inquired, "Who summoned me?"

"I," said the Franciscan, who turned towards the confessor, saying, "My good father, leave us for a moment together; when this gentleman leaves, you will return here." The Jesuit left the room, and doubtless availed himself of this momentary absence from the chamber of the dying man to ask the host for some explanation about this strange penitent, who treated his confessor no better than he would a *valet de chambre*.

The baron approached the bed, and wished to speak; but the hand of the Franciscan imposed silence upon him. "Every moment is precious," said the latter, hurriedly. "You have come here for the competition, have you not?"—"Yes, my father."—"You hope to be elected general of the order?"—

"I hope so."—"You know on what conditions alone you can possibly attain this high position, which makes one man the master of monarchs, the equal of popes?"

"Who are you," inquired the baron, "to subject me to these interrogatories?"—"I am he whom you expect."—"The elector-general?"—"I am the elected."—"You are—" The Franciscan did not give him time to finish; he extended his shrunken hand, on which glittered the ring of the general of the order.

The baron drew back in surprise; and then immediately afterwards, bowing with the profoundest respect, he exclaimed, "Is it possible that you are here, Monseigneur?—you, in this wretched room; you, upon this miserable bed; you, in search of and selecting the future general,—that is, your own successor!"

"Do not distress yourself about that, Monsieur, but fulfil immediately the principal condition,—that of furnishing the order with a secret of such importance that one of the greatest courts of Europe may be by your instrumentality for ever bound to the order. Well, do you possess the secret which you promised in your request addressed to the Grand Council?"—"Monseigneur—"

"Let us proceed, however, in due order. You are the Baron von Wostpur?"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"And this letter is from you?" The general of the Jesuits drew a paper from his bundle, and presented it to the baron, who glanced at it, and made a sign in the affirmative, saying, "Yes, Monseigneur, this letter is mine."—"Can you show me the reply which the secretary of the Grand Council returned to you?"—"This is it, Monseigneur," said the baron, holding towards the Franciscan a letter bearing simply the address, "To his Excellency the Baron von Wostpur," and containing only this phrase, "From the 15th to the 22nd of May, Fontainebleau, the hotel of the Beau-Paon.—A. M. D. G."[1]

"Right!" said the Franciscan; "here we are in presence. Speak!"—"I have a body of troops composed of fifty thousand men; all the officers are gained. I am encamped on the Danube. In four days I can overthrow the emperor, who is, as you are aware, opposed to the progress of our order, and can replace him by whichever of the princes of his family the order may determine upon." The Franciscan listened unmoved. "Is that all?" he said.—"A revolution throughout Europe is included in my plan," said the baron.—"Very well, M. de

[1] Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

Wostpur, you will receive a reply; return to your room, and leave Fontainebleau within a quarter of an hour."

The baron withdrew backwards, just as obsequiously as if he were taking leave of the emperor whom he was ready to betray. "There is no secret there," murmured the Franciscan, "it is a plot. Besides," he added, after a moment's reflection, "the future of Europe is no longer in the House of Austria;" and with a red pencil which he held in his hand he struck the Baron von Wostpur's name from the list. "Now for the cardinal," he said; "we ought to get something more serious on the part of Spain." Raising his eyes, he perceived the confessor, who was awaiting his orders as submissively as a school-boy. "Ah!" he said, noticing his submissive air, "you have been talking with the landlord."—"Yes, Monseigneur; and to the physician."—"To Grisart?"—"Yes."—"He is here, then?"—"He is waiting with the potion he promised."

"Very well; if I require him, I will call. You now understand the great importance of my confession, do you not?"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"Then go and fetch me the Spanish Cardinal Herrebia. Make haste! Only, as you now understand the matter in hand, you will remain near me, for I begin to feel faint."—"Shall I summon the physician?"—"Not yet, not yet—the Spanish cardinal—no one else. Fly!"

Five minutes afterwards the cardinal, pale and disturbed, entered the little room. "I am informed, Monseigneur—" stammered the cardinal.

"To the point," said the Franciscan in a faint voice, showing the cardinal a letter which he had written to the Grand Council. "Is that your handwriting?" he asked.—"Yes, but—"—"And your summons here?"

The cardinal hesitated to answer. His purple revolted against the mean garb of the poor Franciscan. The dying man stretched out his hand and displayed the ring, which produced its effect, greater in proportion to the elevation of the person over whom the Franciscan exercised his influence. "Quick! the secret, the secret!" demanded the dying man, leaning upon his confessor.—"*Coram isti?*" inquired the Spanish cardinal.—"Speak in Spanish," said the Franciscan, showing the most eager attention.

"You are aware, Monseigneur," said the cardinal, continuing the conversation in the Castilian dialect, "that the condition of the marriage of the infanta with the King of France is the absolute renunciation of the rights of the said infanta, as well

as of King Louis XIV., to all claim to the crown of Spain." The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative. "The consequence is," continued the cardinal, "that the peace and alliance between the two kingdoms depend upon the observance of that clause of the contract." A similar sign from the Franciscan. "Not only France and Spain," said the cardinal, "but the whole of Europe even, would be violently rent asunder by the faithlessness of either party." Another movement of the sick man's head. "It further results," continued the speaker, "that the man who might be able to foresee events, and to render certain that which is no more than a vague idea floating in the mind of man, —that is to say, the idea of future good or evil,—would preserve the world from a great catastrophe; and the divining of future events in the very brain of him who prepares them could be turned to the advantage of our order."—"*Pronto, pronto!*" murmured the Franciscan, who suddenly became paler, and leaned upon the priest.

The cardinal approached the ear of the dying man, and said: "Well, Monseigneur, I know that the King of France has determined that at the first pretext—a death for instance, either that of the King of Spain or that of a brother of the infanta—France will, arms in hand, claim the inheritance; and I have in my possession, already prepared, the plan of policy agreed upon by Louis XIV. for that emergency."—"And this plan?" said the Franciscan.—"Here it is," returned the cardinal.

"In whose handwriting is it?"—"In my own."—"Have you anything further to say?"—"I think that I have said a good deal, Monseigneur," replied the cardinal.

"Yes, you have rendered the order a great service. But how did you procure the details by the aid of which you have constructed your plan?"—"I have the under servants of the King of France in my pay, and I obtain from them all the waste papers, which have been saved from being burned."—"Very ingenious," murmured the Franciscan, endeavouring to smile. "Monsieur the Cardinal, you will leave this hotel in a quarter of an hour, and a reply shall be sent you. Go!" The cardinal withdrew.

"Call Grisart, and go and bring me the Venetian Marini," said the sick man. While the confessor obeyed, the Franciscan, instead of striking out the cardinal's name, as he had done the baron's, made a cross at the side of it. Then, exhausted by the effort, he fell back on his bed, murmuring the name of Dr. Grisart. When he returned to his senses, he had drunk about half of the

potion, of which the remainder was left in the glass, and he found himself supported by the physician, while the Venetian and the confessor were standing close to the door. The Venetian submitted to the same formalities as his two competitors, and hesitated as they had done at the sight of the two strangers; but, his confidence restored by the order of the general, he revealed that the pope, terrified at the power of the order, was weaving a plot for the general expulsion of the Jesuits, and was tampering with the different courts of Europe, with the purpose of obtaining their assistance. He described the pontiff's auxiliaries, his means of action, and indicated the particular locality in the Archipelago whither, by a sudden surprise, two cardinals—adepts of the eleventh year, and consequently high in authority—were to be transported, together with thirty-two of the principal affiliated members at Rome.

The Franciscan thanked the Signor Marini. It was by no means a slight service he had rendered the society by denouncing this pontifical project. The Venetian thereupon received directions to depart in a quarter of an hour, and left as radiant as if he already possessed the ring, the sign of the supreme authority of the society. As he was going away, however, the Franciscan murmured on his bed: "All these men are either spies or a sort of police; not one of them is a general. They have all disclosed a plot, but not one of them a secret. It is not by means of ruin or war or force that the Society of Jesus is to be governed, but by that mysterious influence which moral superiority confers. No, the man is not yet found; and to complete the misfortune, Heaven strikes me down, and I am dying. Oh! must the society indeed fall with me for want of a column to support it? Must death, which is waiting for me, swallow up with me the future of the order,—that future which ten years more of my own life would have rendered eternal? For that future, with the reign of the new king, is opening radiant and full of splendour."

These words, partly of meditation, partly uttered aloud, were listened to by the Jesuit confessor with a terror similar to that with which one listens to the wanderings of a person attacked by fever; while Grisart, with a mind of a higher order, drank them in as the revelations of an unknown world, which his eyes could see, but which his hand could not reach. Suddenly the Franciscan roused himself. "Let us finish this," he said; "death is approaching. Oh! just now I was dying resignedly, for I hoped—while now I sink in despair, unless those who

remain— Grisart, Grisart, make me live an hour longer!" Grisart approached the dying monk, and made him swallow a few drops, not of the potion which was still left in the glass, but of the contents of a flask he had upon his person.

"Call the Scotchman!" exclaimed the Franciscan; "call the Bremen merchant! Call, call quickly! I am dying; I am suffocated." The confessor darted forward to seek for assistance,—as if there had been any human strength which could hold back the hand of death, which lay heavily upon the sick man; but at the threshold of the door he found Aramis, who with his finger on his lips, like the statue of Harpocrates, the god of silence, by a look motioned him back to the farther end of the apartment. The physician and the confessor, after having consulted each other by their looks, made a movement as if to keep Aramis back, who, however, with two signs of the cross, each made in a different manner, transfixed them both in their places. "A chief!" they both murmured.

Aramis slowly advanced into the room where the dying man was struggling against the first attack of the death agony. Whether through the effect of the elixir, or because the appearance of Aramis had restored his strength, he made a movement, and with his eyes glaring, his mouth half open, and his hair damp with sweat, sat up on the bed. Aramis felt that the air of the room was stifling. All the windows were closed: the fire was burning upon the hearth; a pair of candles of yellow wax were guttering down in the copper candlesticks, and by their thick smoke still further heated the atmosphere of the room. He opened the window, and fixing upon the dying man a look full of intelligence and respect said to him: "Monseigneur, pray forgive my coming in this manner, before you summoned me; but your state alarms me, and I thought that you might possibly die before you had seen me, for I am the sixth on your list."

The dying man started and looked at the list. "You are, then, he who was formerly called Aramis, and since the Chevalier d'Herblay? You are the Bishop of Vannes, then?"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"I know you, I have seen you."—"At the last jubilee we were with the Holy Father together."—"Yes, yes, I remember; and you place yourself on the list of candidates?"

"Monseigneur, I have heard it said that the order required to become possessed of a great State secret; and knowing that from modesty you had in anticipation resigned your functions in favour of the person who should produce this secret, I wrote to say that I was ready to compete, possessing alone a secret

which I believe to be important."—"Speak!" said the Franciscan; "I am ready to listen to you, and to judge of the importance of the secret."—"Monseigneur, a secret of the value of that which I have the honour to confide to you cannot be communicated by speech. Any idea which has once escaped from the limbo of thought and become vulgarised by any manifestation or communication of it whatever, no longer is the property of him who gave it birth. My words may be overheard by some inquisitive and hostile ear; one ought not, therefore, to speak at random, for in such a case the secret would cease to be one."

"How do you propose, then, to convey your secret?" inquired the dying monk. With one hand Aramis signed to the physician and the confessor to withdraw, and with the other he handed to the Franciscan a paper enclosed in a double envelope. "Is not writing more dangerous still than language?" asked the Franciscan.—"No, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "for you will find within this envelope characters which you and I alone can understand." The Franciscan looked at Aramis, with an astonishment which momentarily increased. "It is a cipher," continued the latter, "which you used in 1655, and which your secretary, Juan Jujan, who is dead, alone could decipher, if he were to be restored to life."

"You knew this cipher, then?"—"It was I who taught it to him," said Aramis, bowing with graceful respect, and advancing towards the door as if to leave the room; but a gesture of the Franciscan, accompanied by a cry for him to remain, detained him.—"*Jésus!*" cried the dying man; "*ecce homo!*" Then reading the paper a second time, he called out, "Approach, approach quickly!"

Aramis returned to the side of the Franciscan, with the same calm countenance and the same respectful manner. The Franciscan, extending his arm, burned by the flame of the candle the paper which Aramis had handed him. Then taking hold of Aramis's hand, he drew him towards him, and inquired, "In what manner and by whose means could you possibly have become acquainted with such a secret?"—"Through Madame de Chevreuse, the intimate friend and confidante of the queen."—"And Madame de Chevreuse?"—"Is dead."—"Did any others know it?"—"A man and woman only, and they of the lower classes."—"Who were they?"—"Persons who had brought him up."—"What has become of them?"—"Dead also. This secret burns like fire."

"And you have survived?"—"No one is aware that I know it."—"And for what length of time have you possessed this secret?"—"For the last fifteen years."—"And you have kept it?"—"I wished to live."—"And you give it to the order without ambition, without requital?"—"I give it to the order with ambition and with a hope of return," said Aramis; "for if you live, Monseigneur, you will make of me, now that you know me, what I can and ought to be."

"And as I am dying," exclaimed the Franciscan, "I constitute you my successor. Take this!" and drawing off the ring, he slipped it on Aramis's finger. Then turning towards the two spectators of this scene, he said: "Be ye witnesses of this, and testify, if need be, that, sick in body but sound in mind, I have freely and voluntarily bestowed this ring, the token of supreme authority, upon Monseigneur d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes, whom I nominate my successor, and before whom I, an humble sinner, about to appear before my Maker, prostrate myself the first, as an example for all to follow;" and the Franciscan bowed lowly and submissively, while the physician and the Jesuit fell on their knees. Aramis, while he became paler than the dying man himself, bent his looks successively upon all the participants in this scene. Gratified ambition flowed with his blood to his heart.

"We must lose no time," said the Franciscan; "what I had to do here oppresses me, devours me! I shall never accomplish it."—"I will do it," said Aramis.—"That is well," said the Franciscan; and then turning towards the Jesuit and the physician, he added, "Leave us alone." They both obeyed. "With this sign," he said, "you are the man needed to shake the world; with this sign you will cast down; with this sign you will build up,—*in hoc signo vinces!* Close the door," he continued. Aramis shut and bolted the door, and returned to the side of the Franciscan. "The pope has conspired against the order," said the monk; "the pope must die."—"He shall die," said Aramis, quietly.

"Seven hundred thousand livres are owing to a Bremen merchant of the name of Donstett, who came here to get the guarantee of my signature."—"He shall be paid," said Aramis.

"Six knights of Malta, whose names are written here, have discovered, by the indiscreetness of one of the affiliated of the eleventh year, the third mysteries; it must be ascertained what these men have done with the secret, to get it back again and suppress it."—"It shall be done."—"Three dangerous affiliated

members must be sent away into Thibet, to perish there; they are condemned. Here are their names."—"I will see that the sentence be carried out."—"Lastly, there is a lady at Anvers, grand-niece of Ravaillac; she holds certain papers in her hands which compromise the order. There has been payable to the family during the last fifty-one years a pension of fifty thousand livres. The pension is a heavy one, and the order is not wealthy. Redeem the papers for a sum of money paid down, or in case of refusal stop the pension—but without risk."—"I will consider the matter," said Aramis.

"A vessel coming from Lima should have entered the port of Lisbon last week; ostensibly it is laden with chocolate, in reality with gold. Every ingot is concealed by a coating of chocolate. The vessel belongs to the order; it is worth seventeen million livres. You will see that claim is laid to it; here are the bills of lading."—"To what port shall I direct it to be taken?"—"To Bayonne."—"Before three weeks are over it shall be there, wind and weather permitting. Is that all?"

The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative, for he could no longer speak. The blood rushed to his throat and his head, and gushed from his mouth, his nostrils, and his eyes. The dying man had barely time to press Aramis's hand, when he fell from his bed in convulsions upon the floor. Aramis placed his hand on the Franciscan's heart, but it had ceased to beat. As he stooped down, he observed that a fragment of the paper which he had given to the Franciscan had escaped being burned. He picked it up and burned it to the last atom. Then, summoning the confessor and the physician, he said to the former: "Your penitent is in heaven; he needs nothing more than prayers and the burial bestowed on the dead. Go and prepare what is necessary for a simple interment, such as a poor monk only would require. Go!" The Jesuit left the room. Then, turning towards the physician, and observing his pale and anxious face, he said, in a low tone of voice, "M. Grisart, empty and clean this glass; there is left in it too much of what the Grand Council desired you to put into it." Grisart, amazed, overcome, completely astounded, almost fell backwards in his extreme terror. Aramis shrugged his shoulders in sign of pity, took the glass and poured out the contents among the ashes of the hearth. He then left the room, carrying the papers of the dead man with him.

CHAPTER CXXVIII

MISSION

THE next day, or rather the same day (for the events we have just described had been concluded only at three o'clock in the morning), before breakfast was served, and as the king was preparing to go to Mass with the two queens; as Monsieur, with the Chevalier de Lorraine and a few other intimate companions, was mounting his horse to set off for the river, to take one of those famous baths for which the ladies of the court were almost wild; when, in fact, no one remained in the château with the exception of Madame, who under the pretext of indisposition would not leave her room,—Montalais was seen, or rather was not seen, to glide stealthily out of the room appropriated to the maids of honour, leading La Vallière after her, who tried to conceal herself as much as possible; and both of them, hurrying secretly through the gardens, succeeded, looking round them at every step they took, in reaching the thicket. The weather was cloudy; a hot wind bowed the flowers and the shrubs; the burning dust, caught up from the roads, was whirled in eddies towards the trees. Montalais, who during their progress had discharged the functions of a clever scout, advanced a few steps farther, and turning round again, to be quite sure that no one was either listening or approaching, said to her companion, "Thank goodness, we are quite alone! Since yesterday every one spies us here, and a circle seems to be drawn round us, as if we were plague-stricken." La Vallière bent down her head and sighed. "It is positively unheard of!" continued Montalais; "from M. Malicorne to M. de Saint-Aignan, every one wishes to get hold of our secret. Come, Louise, let us confer together a little, in order that I may know what plan of action to pursue."

La Vallière lifted upon her companion her beautiful eyes, pure and deep as the azure of a summer sky. "And I," she said,—"I will ask you, why have we been summoned to Madame's own apartment? Why have we slept there, instead of sleeping, as usual, in our own? Why did you return so late, and whence are these measures of strict supervision which have been adopted since this morning with respect to us?"—"My dear Louise, you answer my question by another, or rather by ten others,—which

is not answering me at all. I will tell you all that later; and as they are matters of secondary importance, you can wait. What I ask you—for everything will depend upon that—is, whether there is or is not any secret."

"I do not know that there is any secret," said La Vallière; "but I do know, for my own part at least, that there has been great imprudence committed. Since the foolish remark I made, and my still more silly fainting yesterday, every one here is making remarks about us."—"Speak for yourself, my dear," said Montalais, laughing,—"speak for yourself and for Tonnay-Charente; for both of you made your declarations of love to the skies yesterday, and unfortunately they were intercepted." La Vallière hung down her head. "Really, you overwhelm me," she said.

"I?"—"Yes! you are killing me with your jests."—"Listen to me, Louise! These are no jests; on the contrary, nothing is more serious. I did not drag you out of the château, I did not miss attending Mass, I did not pretend to have a headache,—as Madame did, and which she has as much as I have,—and lastly I did not display ten times more diplomacy than M. Colbert inherited from M. de Mazarin and makes use of with respect to M. Fouquet, in order to find means of confiding my perplexities to you, for the sole end and purpose that when at last we are alone and no one can listen to us, you are to continue to deal hypocritically with me. No, no! believe me that when I ask you any questions it is not from curiosity alone, but really because the position is a critical one. What you said yesterday is now known; it is a text on which every one is discoursing. Every one embellishes it to the utmost, according to his own fancy. You had the honour last night, and you have it still to-day, of occupying the whole court, my dear; and the number of tender and witty remarks which have been ascribed to you would make Mademoiselle de Scudéry and her brother burst from very spite if they were faithfully reported to them."

"But, dearest Montalais," said the poor girl, "you know better than any one what I did say, since you were present when I said it."—"Yes, I know; but that is not the question. I have not even forgotten a single syllable you said; but did you think the thing you said?"

Louise became confused. "What!" she exclaimed, "more questions still? Oh, heavens! when I would give the whole world to forget what I did say, how does it happen that every

one does his utmost to remind me of it? Oh, this is indeed terrible!"—"What is?"—"To have a friend who ought to spare me, who might advise me and help me to save myself, and yet who is destroying—is killing me."—"There, there, that will do!" said Montalais; "after having said too little, you now say too much. No one thinks of killing you, nor even of robbing you, even of your secret. I wish to have it voluntarily, and in no other way,—for the question does not concern your own affairs only, but ours also; and Tonnay-Charente would tell you as I do, if she were here. For the fact is that last evening she wished to have some private conversation in our room; and I was going there after the Manicampian and Malicornian colloquies had terminated, when I learned on my return—rather late, it is true—that Madame had sequestered her maids of honour, and that we are to sleep in her apartments instead of our own rooms. Moreover, Madame has sequestered her maids of honour in order that they should not have the time to concert any measures together; and this morning she was closeted with Tonnay-Charente with the same object. Tell me, then, dear friend, to what extent Athenaïs and I can rely upon you, as we will tell you in what way you can rely upon us."

"I do not clearly understand the question you have put," said Louise, much agitated.—"Hum! and yet, on the contrary, you seem to understand me very well. However, I will put my questions in a more precise manner, in order that you may not be able in the slightest degree to evade them. Listen to me! *Do you love M. de Bragelonne?* That is plain enough, is it not?"

At this question, which fell like the first projectile of a besieging army into a besieged town, Louise started. "You ask me," she exclaimed, "if I love Raoul, the friend of my childhood,—my brother, almost!"—"No, no, no! Again you evade me,—or you wish to evade me. I do not ask you if you love Raoul, your childhood's friend, your brother; but I ask if you love M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne, your affianced husband."—"Good heavens, my dear Montalais!" said Louise; "how severe your tone is!"—"You deserve no indulgence. I am neither more nor less severe than usual. I put a question to you; so answer it!"

"You certainly do not," said Louise, in a choking voice, "speak to me like a friend; but I will answer you as a true friend."—"Well, do so."—"Very well; my heart is full of scruples and silly feelings of pride with respect to everything

that a woman ought to keep secret, and in this respect no one has ever read my inmost heart."

"That I know very well. If I had read it, I should not ask you questions; I should simply say: 'My good Louise, you have the happiness of an acquaintance with M. de Bragelonne, who is an excellent young man, and an advantageous match for a girl without any fortune. M. de la Fère will leave something like fifteen thousand livres a year to his son. At a future day, then, you, as this son's wife, will have fifteen thousand livres a year,—which is not bad. Turn, then, neither to the right hand nor to the left, but go frankly to M. de Bragelonne,—that is to say, to the altar to which he will lead you. Afterwards,—why, afterwards, according to his disposition, you will be emancipated or enslaved; in other words, you will have a right to commit any piece of folly which people commit who have either too much liberty or too little.' That is, my dear Louise, what I should have told you at first, if I had been able to read your heart."—"And I should have thanked you," stammered Louise, "although the advice does not appear to me to be altogether good."

"Wait, wait! But immediately after having given you that advice, I should add: 'Louise, it is dangerous to pass whole days with your head reclining on your bosom, your hands unoccupied, your eyes wandering; it is dangerous to prefer the least-frequented paths, and no longer to be amused with such diversions as gladden young girls' hearts; it is dangerous, Louise, to write with the point of your foot, as you are doing upon the gravel, certain letters which it is useless for you to efface, but which appear again under your heel, particularly when those letters rather resemble the letter L than the letter B; and lastly, it is dangerous to allow the mind to dwell on a thousand wild fancies, the fruits of solitude and headaches. These fancies, while they sink into a young girl's mind, make her cheeks sink in also; so that it is not unusual under such circumstances to find the most delightful persons in the world becoming the most disagreeable, and the wittiest becoming the dullest.'"—"I thank you, my dearest Aure," replied La Vallière, gently; "it is like you to speak to me in this manner, and I thank you for it."

"It was only for the benefit of wild dreamers, such as I described, that I spoke; do not take any of my words, then, to yourself except such as you think you deserve. Stay! I hardly know what story recurs to my memory of some silly or melan-

choly young girl,—for M. Dangeau explained to me the other day that *mélancolie* should be grammatically written *mélancholie*, with an *h*, because the French word is formed of two Greek words, of which one means *black* and the other *bile*. I return, then, to that young woman who was dying of *black bile* because she fancied that the prince or the king or the emperor, whoever it was,—and it does not much matter which,—had fallen completely in love with her; while, on the contrary, the prince or the king or the emperor, whichever you please, was plainly in love with some one else, and (a singular circumstance,—one, indeed, which she could not perceive, although every one around and about her perceived it clearly enough) made use of her as a screen for his own love-affair. You laugh, as I do, at this poor silly girl, do you not, La Vallière?"—"I laugh, of course," stammered Louise, pale as death.

"And you are right, too, for the thing is amusing enough. The story, whether true or false, amused me; and so I have remembered it and told it to you. Just imagine, then, my good Louise, the mischief that such a melancholy would create in your brain,—a melancholy, I mean, with an *h*. For my own part I resolved to tell you the story; for if such a thing were to happen to one of us, she ought to be well assured of this truth: to-day it is a snare; to-morrow it will become a jest and mockery; the next day it will be death itself." La Vallière started again, and became, if possible, still paler. "Whenever a king takes notice of us," continued Montalais, "he lets us see it easily enough; and if we happen to be the object he covets, he knows very well how to gain his object. You see, then, Louise, that in such circumstances, between young girls exposed to such a danger, the most perfect confidence should exist, in order that those hearts which are not disposed towards melancholy may watch over those which are likely to become so."

"Silence, silence!" exclaimed La Vallière; "some one is approaching."—"Some one is indeed approaching," said Montalais; "but who can it be? Everybody is away, either at Mass with the king or bathing with Monsieur."

At the end of the walk the young girls perceived almost immediately, beneath the arching trees, the graceful carriage and noble height of a young man, who with his sword under his arm and a cloak thrown across his shoulders, and booted and spurred besides, saluted them from the distance with a charming smile. "Raoul!" exclaimed Montalais.—"M. de Bragelonne!" murmured Louise.

"A very proper judge to decide upon our difference of opinion," said Montalais.—"Oh, Montalais, Montalais, for pity's sake," exclaimed La Vallière, "after having been so cruel, show me a little mercy!" These words, uttered with all the fervour of a prayer, effaced all trace of irony from Montalais's face, if not from her heart also. "Why, you are as handsome as Amadis, M. de Bragelonne," she cried to Raoul, "and armed and booted like him!"—"A thousand compliments, Mesdemoiselles," replied Raoul, bowing.

"But why, I ask, are you booted in this manner?" repeated Montalais; while La Vallière, although she looked at Raoul with a surprise equal to that of her companion, nevertheless uttered not a word.—"Why?" inquired Raoul.—"Yes," ventured La Vallière, in turn.—"Because I am going away," said Bragelonne, looking at Louise.

The young girl felt herself smitten by some superstitious feeling of terror, and tottered. "You are going away, Raoul!" she cried; "and where are you going?"—"Dearest Louise," replied the young man, with that quiet, composed manner which was natural to him, "I am going to England."—"What are you going to do in England?"—"The king has sent me there."—"The king!" exclaimed Louise and Aure together, involuntarily exchanging glances, the conversation which had just been interrupted recurring to them both.

Raoul intercepted the glance, but he could not understand its meaning, and, naturally enough, attributed it to the interest which both the young girls took in him. "His Majesty," he said, "has been good enough to remember that M. le Comte de la Fère is high in favour with King Charles II. This morning, then, as he was on his way to attend Mass, the king, seeing me as he passed, signed to me to approach, which I accordingly did. 'M. de Bragelonne,' he said to me, 'you will call upon M. Fouquet, who has received from me letters for the King of Great Britain; you will be the bearer of those letters.' I bowed. 'Ah!' his Majesty added, 'before you leave, you will be good enough to take any commissions which Madame may have for the king her brother.'"—"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Louise, much agitated, and yet full of thought at the same time.

"So quickly! You are desired to set off in such haste!" said Montalais, almost paralysed by this unforeseen event.—"Properly to obey those whom we respect," said Raoul, "it is necessary to obey quickly. Within ten minutes after I had received the order, I was ready. Madame, already informed,

is writing the letter which she is so kind as to do me the honour of entrusting to me. In the meantime, learning from Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente that it was likely you would be in the direction of the grove, I came here, and am happy to find you both."

"And both of us in great suffering, as you see," said Montalais, coming to Louise's assistance, whose countenance was visibly altered.—"Suffering?" repeated Raoul, pressing Louise de la Vallière's hand with a tender curiosity. "Why, really, your hand is like ice."—"It is nothing."—"This coldness does not reach your heart, Louise, does it?" inquired the young man, with a tender smile.

Louise raised her head hastily, as if this question had been inspired by some suspicion, and had aroused a feeling of remorse. "Oh, you know," she said with an effort, "that my heart will never be cold towards a friend like yourself, M. de Bragelonne."—"Thank you, Louise. I know both your heart and your mind, and it is not by the touch of the hand that one can judge of an affection like yours. You know, Louise, how devotedly I love you, with what perfect and unreserved confidence I have resigned my life to you; will you not forgive me, then, for speaking to you with something like the frankness of a child?"

"Speak, M. Raoul," said Louise, trembling very much; "I am listening."—"I cannot part from you carrying away with me a thought which torments me. Absurd I know it to be, and yet it is one which rends my very heart."—"Are you going away, then, for any length of time?" inquired La Vallière, with a thickened utterance, while Montalais turned her head aside.—"No; and probably I shall not be absent more than a fortnight." La Vallière pressed her hand upon her heart, which felt as though it were breaking. "It is strange," pursued Raoul, looking at the young girl with a melancholy expression. "I have often left you when setting off on adventures fraught with danger. Then I started joyously enough,—my heart free, my mind intoxicated by the thought of happiness to come, of hopes for the future; and yet at that time I was about to face the Spanish cannon or the cruel halberds of the Walloons. To-day, without the existence of any danger or uneasiness and by the easiest manner in the world, I am going in search of a glorious recompense, which this mark of the king's favour promises me; for I am, perhaps, going to win you, Louise. What other favour, more precious than yourself, could the king confer upon me? Yet, Louise, in very truth, I know not how or why, but all this

happiness and all this future seem to vanish from my eyes like smoke, like an idle dream; and I feel here, here at the very bottom of my heart, a deep-seated grief, a dejection which I cannot express in words,—something heavy, torpid, death-like. Oh, Louise, too well do I know why; it is because I have never loved you so truly as now. Oh, my God! my God!"

At this last exclamation, which issued as it were from a broken heart, Louise burst into tears, and threw herself into Montalais's arms. The latter, although she was not very easily moved with emotion, felt the tears rush to her eyes and her heart compressed as though in a vice. Raoul saw only the tears of his betrothed; his look, however, did not penetrate—nay, sought not to penetrate—beyond those tears. He bent his knee before her, and tenderly kissed her hand; and it was evident that in that kiss he poured out his whole heart before her. "Rise, rise," said Montalais to him, herself ready to cry; "for here is Athenaïs coming."

Raoul rose, brushed his knee with the back of his hand, smiled again upon Louise, whose eyes were fixed on the ground, and having pressed Montalais's hand gratefully, turned to salute Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, the sound of whose silken robe was already heard upon the gravel-walk. "Has Madame finished her letter?" he inquired, when the young girl came within reach of his voice.—"Yes, Monsieur the Viscount, the letter is finished, sealed, and her royal highness awaits you." Raoul at this remark hardly gave himself time to salute Athenaïs, cast one last look at Louise, bowed to Montalais, and withdrew in the direction of the château. As he withdrew he again turned round; but at last, at the end of the grand walk, it was useless to do so again, as he could no longer see them. The three young girls on their side had with very different feelings watched him till he disappeared.

"At last," said Athenaïs, the first to break the silence,—"at last we are alone, free to talk of yesterday's great affair, and to come to an understanding upon the conduct it is advisable for us to pursue. Besides, if you will listen to me," she continued, looking round on all sides, "I will explain to you as briefly as possible, in the first place, our own duty, such as I understand it, and, if you do not understand a hint, what is Madame's desire on the subject." Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente pronounced these words in such a tone as to leave no doubt, in her companions' minds, of the official character with which she was invested. "Madame's desire!" exclaimed Montalais and

Louise, together.—" Her *ultimatum,*" replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, diplomatically.

" But, good heavens! Mademoiselle," murmured La Vallière, " does Madame know, then—"—" Madame knows more about the matter than we said even," said Athenaïs, in a formal, precise manner; " therefore, Mesdemoiselles, let us come to a proper understanding."—" Yes, indeed," said Montalais; " and I am listening in breathless attention. Speak, Athenaïs!"

" Gracious Heaven!" murmured Louise, trembling, " shall I ever recover from that cruel evening?"—" Oh, do not frighten yourself in that manner!" said Athenaïs; " we have found a remedy for it." So, seating herself between her two companions, and taking each of them by the hand, which she held in her own, she began. The first words were hardly spoken, when they heard a horse galloping away over the stones of the public high-road, outside the gates of the château.

CHAPTER CXXIX

HAPPY AS A PRINCE

At the very moment when he was about entering the château, Bragelonne had met De Guiche. But before having been met by Raoul, De Guiche had met Manicamp, who had met Malicorne. How was it that Malicorne had met Manicamp? Nothing more simple, for he had awaited his return from Mass, where he had accompanied M. de Saint-Aignan. When they met, they had congratulated each other upon their good fortune, and Manicamp had availed himself of the circumstance to ask his friend if he had not a few crowns still remaining at the bottom of his pocket. The latter, without expressing any surprise at the question, which he perhaps expected, had answered that a pocket on which one is drawing continually without ever putting anything into it resembles those wells which can supply water during the winter, but which the gardeners exhaust during the summer; that his (Malicorne's) pocket certainly was deep, and that there would be a pleasure in drawing on it in times of plenty, but that unhappily abuse had produced barrenness. To this remark Manicamp, deep in thought, had replied, " Quite true!"—" The question, then, is how to fill it?" Malicorne had added.

" Of course; but in what way?"—" Nothing easier, my dear

M. Manicamp."—"Good! How?"—"A post in Monsieur's household, and the pocket is full again."—"You have the post?"—"That is, I have the promise of being nominated."—"Well?"—"Yes; but the promise of nomination, without the post itself, is the purse without money."—"Quite true," Manicamp had replied a second time.

"Let us try for the post, then," the candidate had persisted.—"My dear fellow," sighed Manicamp, "an appointment in Monsieur's household is one of the gravest difficulties of our position."—"Oh! oh!"—"There is no question that at the present moment we cannot ask Monsieur for anything."—"Why so?"—"Because we are not on good terms with him."—"Absurd!" said Malicorne, flatly.

"Bah! and if we were to show Madame any attention," said Manicamp, "frankly speaking, do you think we should please Monsieur?"—"Precisely; if we show Madame any attention, and do so adroitly, Monsieur ought to adore us."—"Hum!"—"Either that, or we are great fools; make haste, therefore, M. Manicamp, you who are so able a politician, to reconcile M. de Guiche to his royal highness."

"What did M. de Saint-Aignan tell you, Malicorne?"—"Tell me? Nothing; he asked me several questions, and that was all."—"Well, he was less discreet with me."—"What did he tell you?"—"That the king is passionately in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."—"We knew that already," replied Malicorne, ironically, "and everybody talks about it loudly enough for every one to know it; but in the meantime pray do what I advise you. Speak to M. de Guiche, and endeavour to get him to make an advance towards Monsieur. Deuce take it! he owes his royal highness that, at least."

"But we must see De Guiche, then?"—"There does not seem to be any great difficulty in that. Try to see him in the same way in which I tried to see you; wait for him,—you know that he is naturally very fond of walking."—"Yes; but where does he walk?"—"What a question to ask! Do you not know that he is in love with Madame?"—"So it is said."—"Very well; you will find him walking about on the side of the château where her apartments are."

"Stay, my dear Malicorne! you were not mistaken, for here he comes."—"Why should I be mistaken? Have you ever noticed that I am in the habit of making mistakes? Come! we only need to understand each other. Are you in want of money?"—"Ah!" exclaimed Manicamp, mournfully.

"Well, I want my appointment. Let Malicorne have the appointment, and Manicamp shall have the money; it is not more difficult than that."—"Very well. In that case make yourself easy; I will do my best."—"Do so." De Guiche approached. Malicorne stepped aside; and Manicamp caught hold of De Guiche, who was thoughtful and melancholy. "Tell me, my dear Count, what rhyme you were trying to find," said Manicamp. "I have an excellent one to match yours,—particularly if yours ends in *âme*."

De Guiche shook his head, and recognising a friend, took him by the arm: "My dear Manicamp," he said, "I am in search of something very different from a rhyme."—"What is it for which you are looking?"—"You will help me to find what I am in search of," continued the count,—"you, who are such an idle fellow; in other words, a man with a mind full of ingenious devices."—"I am getting my ingenuity ready, then, my dear Count."—"This is the state of the case, then: I wish to approach a particular house, where I have business."—"You must get near the house, then," said Manicamp.

"Very good; but in this house dwells a husband who happens to be jealous."—"Is he more jealous than the dog Cerberus?"—"Not more, but quite as much so."—"Has he three mouths, like that obdurate guardian of the infernal regions? Do not shrug your shoulders, my dear Count! I put the question to you with a perfect reason for doing so, since poets pretend that in order to soften M. Cerberus the visitor must take something enticing with him,—a cake, for instance. Therefore I, who view the matter in a prosaic light,—that is to say, the light of reality,—I say, one cake is very little for three mouths. If your jealous husband has three mouths, Count, get three cakes."—"Manicamp, I can get such advice as that from M. Beautru."—"In order to get better advice, Monsieur the Count," said Manicamp, with comical seriousness, "you will be obliged to adopt a more precise formula than that which you have used towards me."

"If Raoul were here;" said De Guiche, "he would be sure to understand me."—"So I think,—particularly if you said to him, 'I should very much like to see *Madame* a little nearer; but I fear *Monsieur*, who is jealous.'"—"Manicamp!" cried the count, angrily, and endeavouring by a look to overwhelm his tormentor, who did not, however, appear to be in the slightest degree disturbed by it.—"What is the matter now, my dear Count?" inquired Manicamp.

"What! is it thus that you blaspheme the most sacred of names?" cried De Guiche.—"What names?"—"Monsieur! Madame!—the highest names in the kingdom."—"You are very strangely mistaken, my dear Count. I never mentioned the highest names in the kingdom. I merely answered you in reference to the subject of a jealous husband, whose name you did not tell me, and who as a matter of course has a wife. I therefore replied to you, 'In order to see *Madame*, you must get a little more intimate with *Monsieur*.'"—"Wretched jester!" said the count, smiling; "was that what you meant?"—"Nothing else."—"Very good; what then?"

"Now," added Manicamp, "let the question be regarding Madame la Duchesse —— or M. le Duc ——; very well, I shall say: Let us get into the house, wherever it may be; for that is a scheme which cannot in any case be unfavourable to your love-affair."—"Ah! Manicamp, if you could find me a pretext, a good pretext."—"A pretext, *pardieu!* a hundred, nay, a thousand pretexts. If Malicorne were here, he would have already hit upon fifty thousand excellent pretexts."

"Who is Malicorne?" said De Guiche, half shutting his eyes like a person trying to recollect; "I seem to know the name."—"Know him! I should think so; you owe his father thirty thousand crowns."—"Ah, indeed! so it's that worthy fellow from Orléans."—"Whom you promised an appointment in Monsieur's household,—not the jealous husband, but the other."—"Well, then, since your friend Malicorne is so clever, let him find me a means of being adored by Monsieur, and a pretext to make my peace with him."—"Very good; I'll talk to him about it."

"But who is that coming?"—"The Vicomte de Bragelonne."—"Raoul! yes, it is he," said De Guiche, as he hastened forward to meet the young man. "You here, Raoul!" said he.

"Yes, I was looking for you to say farewell, my dear friend," replied Raoul, grasping the count's hand. "How do you do, M. Manicamp?"—"How is this, Viscount,—you are leaving us?"—"Yes, a mission from the king."—"Where are you going?"—"To London. On leaving you, I am going to Madame. She has a letter to give me for his Majesty King Charles II."—"You will find her alone; for Monsieur has gone out,—gone to bathe, in fact."

"In that case you, my dear friend, who are one of Monsieur's gentlemen in waiting, will undertake to make my excuses to him. I should have waited in order to receive any directions

he might have to give me, if the desire for my immediate departure had not been intimated to me by M. Fouquet on behalf of his Majesty." Manicamp touched De Guiche's elbow. "There's a pretext for you," said he.—"What?"—"M. de Bragelonne's excuses."—"A weak pretext," said De Guiche.

"An excellent one, if Monsieur is not angry with you; but a paltry one, like any other, if he bears you ill-will."—"You are right, Manicamp; a pretext, whatever it may be, is all I require. And so a pleasant journey to you, Raoul!" and the two friends thereupon took a warm leave of each other.

Five minutes afterwards Raoul entered Madame's apartments, as Mademoiselle de Montalais had begged him to do. Madame was still seated at the table where she had written her letter. Before her was burning the rose-coloured taper which she had used to seal it. Only, in her preoccupation,—for Madame seemed to be buried in thought,—she had forgotten to extinguish the taper.

Bragelonne was expected, and was announced, therefore, as soon as he appeared. He was the picture of elegance; it was impossible to see him once without always remembering him; and not only had Madame seen him once, but it will not be forgotten that he was one of the very first who had gone to meet her, and had accompanied her from Havre to Paris. Madame had preserved, therefore, an excellent recollection of Bragelonne. "Ah, Monsieur, here you are!" she said to him; "you are going to see my brother, who will be delighted to pay to the son a portion of the debt of gratitude he has contracted with the father."—"The Comte de la Fère, Madame, has been abundantly recompensed for the little service he had the happiness to render the king, by the kindness which the king manifested towards him; and it is I who will have to convey to his Majesty the assurance of the respect, devotion, and gratitude of father and son."

"Do you know my brother, Monsieur the Viscount?"—"No, your Highness; I shall have the honour of seeing his Majesty for the first time."—"You require no recommendation to him. At all events, however, if you have any doubt about your personal merit, take me unhesitatingly for your surety."—"Your royal Highness overwhelms me with your kindness."—"No, M. de Bragelonne, I well remember that we were fellow-travellers once, and that I remarked your extreme prudence in the midst of the extravagant absurdities committed, to your right and left, by two of the greatest simpletons in the world,

M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham. Let us not speak of them, however, but of yourself. Are you going to England to remain there permanently? Forgive my inquiry; it is not curiosity, but a desire to be of service to you in anything that I can do."

"No, Madame; I am going to England to fulfil a mission which his Majesty has been kind enough to confide to me,—that is all."—"And you propose to return to France?"—"As soon as I shall have accomplished my mission; unless, indeed, his Majesty King Charles II. should have other orders for me."—"He will beg you at the very least, I am sure, to remain near him as long as possible."—"In that case, as I shall not know how to refuse, I will now beforehand entreat your royal Highness to have the goodness to remind the King of France that one of his most devoted servants is far away from him."

"Take care that at the time you are recalled you do not consider his command as an abuse of power."—"I do not understand you, Madame."—"The court of France is not easily matched, I am aware; but yet we have some pretty women at the court of England also." Raoul smiled. "Oh," said Madame, "yours is a smile which portends no good to my countrywomen! It is as though you were telling them, M. de Bragelonne, 'I visit you, but I leave my heart on the other side of the Channel.' Did not your smile indicate that?"—"Your Highness is gifted with the power of reading the inmost depths of the soul, and you will understand, therefore, why at present any prolonged residence at the court of England would be a matter of the deepest regret for me."

"And I need not inquire if so gallant a knight is recompensed in return?"—"I have been brought up, Madame, with her whom I love, and I believe that she has the same feelings towards me that I have for her."—"In that case do not delay your departure, M. de Bragelonne, and delay not your return, for on your return we shall see two persons happy; for I hope that no obstacle exists to your felicity."—"There is a great obstacle to it, Madame."—"Indeed! what is it?"—"The king's wishes on the subject."

"The king's wishes? The king opposes your marriage?"—"Or at least he postpones it. I solicited his Majesty's consent through the Comte de la Fère; and without absolutely refusing it, he at least positively said that it must be deferred."—"Is the young lady whom you love unworthy of you, then?"—"She is worthy of a king's affection, Madame."—"I mean, she is not,

perhaps, of birth equal to your own?"—"She is of an excellent family."—"Is she young and beautiful?"—"She is seventeen, and in my opinion exceedingly beautiful."

"Is she in the country or at Paris?"—"She is at Fontainebleau, Madame."—"At the court?"—"Yes."—"Do I know her?"—"She has the honour to form one of your royal Highness's household."—"Her name?" inquired the princess, anxiously,—"if, indeed," she added, checking herself hastily, "her name is not a secret."—"No, Madame, my affection is too pure for me to make a secret of it to any one,—and with still greater reason to your Highness, whose kindness towards me has been so extreme. It is Mademoiselle Louise de la Vallière."

Madame could not restrain an exclamation, in which there was a stronger feeling than surprise. "Ah!" she said, "La Vallière,—she who yesterday—" She paused, and then continued, "She who yesterday was taken ill, I believe?"—"Yes, Madame; it was only this morning that I heard of the accident which had befallen her."—"Did you see her before you came to me?"—"I had the honour of taking leave of her."

"And you say," resumed Madame, making a powerful effort over herself, "that the king has—deferred your marriage with this young girl?"—"Yes, Madame, deferred it."—"Did he assign any reason for this postponement?"—"None."—"How long is it since the Comte de la Fère preferred his request?"—"More than a month, Madame."—"It is very singular," said the princess, as something like a cloud passed across her eyes. "A month?" she repeated.

"About a month."—"You are right, Monsieur the Viscount," said the princess, with a smile in which Bragelonne might have remarked a kind of restraint; "my brother must not keep you too long over there. Set off at once, and in the first letter I write to England I will claim you in the king's name;" and Madame rose to place her letter in Bragelonne's hands. Raoul understood that his audience was at an end; he took the letter, bowed low to the princess, and left the room.

"A month!" murmured the princess; "could I have been blind, then, to so great an extent, and could he have loved her for this last month?" And as Madame had nothing to do she sat down to begin a letter to her brother, the postscript of which was a summons for Bragelonne to return.

The Comte de Guiche, as we have seen, had yielded to the pressing persuasions of Manicamp, and allowed himself to be

led to the stables, where they had their horses saddled; then by the side-path, a description of which has already been given, they advanced to meet Monsieur, who having just finished bathing was returning all fresh towards the château, wearing a woman's veil to protect his face from getting burned by the heat of the sun, which was already great. Monsieur was in one of those fits of good humour with which the admiration of his own good looks sometimes inspired him. As he was bathing he had been able to compare the whiteness of his body with that of his courtiers; and thanks to the care which his royal highness took of himself, no one, not even the Chevalier de Lorraine, could bear the comparison. Monsieur, moreover, had been tolerably successful in swimming, and his muscles having been properly exercised by the invigorating immersion in the cool water, he was in a light and cheerful state of mind and body; so that at the sight of De Guiche, who advanced to meet him at a hand gallop, mounted upon a magnificent white horse, the prince could not restrain an exclamation of delight.

"I think matters look well," said Manicamp, who fancied he could read this friendly disposition upon his royal highness's countenance.

"Ah, good-day, Guiche! good-day, my poor Guiche!" exclaimed the prince.—"Long life to your Highness!" replied De Guiche, encouraged by the tone of Philip's voice; "health, joy, happiness, and prosperity to your Highness!"—"Welcome, Guiche! Come on my right side, but keep your horse in hand, for I wish to return at a walking pace, under the cool shade of these trees."—"At your service, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, taking his place on the prince's right, as he had just been invited to do.

"Now, my dear De Guiche," said the prince, "give me a little news of that De Guiche whom I used to know formerly, and who used to pay attentions to my wife." De Guiche blushed to the very whites of his eyes; while Monsieur burst out laughing, as though he had made the wittiest remark in the world. The few privileged courtiers who surrounded Monsieur thought it their duty to follow his example, although they had not heard the remark; and a noisy burst of laughter immediately followed, beginning with the first courtier, passing on through the whole company, and only terminating with the last. De Guiche, although blushing extremely, put a good countenance on the matter. Manicamp was watching him.

"Ah, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, "show a little charity

towards an unfortunate man; do not hold me up to the ridicule of M. le Chevalier de Lorraine."—"How do you mean?"—"If he hears you ridicule me, he will go beyond your Highness, and will show no pity."—"About your passion for the princess?"—"For mercy's sake, Monseigneur!"

"Come, come, De Guiche, confess that you did get a little sweet upon Madame."—"Never will I confess such a thing, Monseigneur!"—"Out of respect for me? Well, I release you from your respect, De Guiche. Confess, as if it were simply a question about Mademoiselle de Chalais or Mademoiselle de la Vallière." Then breaking off, he said, beginning to laugh again: "Come, that is very good,—a remark like a sword which cuts two ways at once. I hit you and my brother at the same time,—Chalais and La Vallière, your affianced bride and his future lady-love."

"Really, Monseigneur," said the count, "you are in a most brilliant humour to-day."—"Yes, upon my word, I feel well; and then I am pleased to see you again."—"Thank you, Monseigneur."—"But you were angry with me, were you not?"—"I, Monseigneur? Why should I have been so?"—"Because I interfered with your sarabands and your other Spanish amusements. Nay, do not deny it! On that day when you left the princess's apartments with your eyes full of fury,—that brought you ill luck, my dear fellow, for you danced in the ballet yesterday in a most miserable manner. Now don't get sulky, De Guiche, for it does you no good, but makes you look as surly as a bear. If the princess did look at you attentively yesterday, I am quite sure of one thing."

"What is that, Monseigneur? Your Highness alarms me."—"She has quite forsworn you now," said the prince, laughing still louder.—"Decidedly," thought Manicamp, "rank has nothing to do with it, and all men are alike."

The prince continued: "At all events, here you are back again; and it is to be hoped that the chevalier will become amiable again."—"How so, Monseigneur; and by what miracle can I exercise such an influence over M. de Lorraine?"—"The matter is very simple; he is jealous of you."—"Bah! it is not possible."—"It is the case, though."—"He does me too much honour, then."

"The fact is that when you are here he is full of kindness and attention, but when you are gone he makes me suffer a perfect martyrdom. I am like a see-saw. Besides, you do not know the idea which has struck me."—"I do not even suspect it,

Monseigneur."—"Well, then, when you were in exile,—for you really were exiled, my poor Guiche—"

"*Pardieu*, Monseigneur; but whose fault was it?" said De Guiche, pretending to speak in an angry tone.—"Not mine, certainly, my dear Count," replied his royal highness; "upon my honour, I did not ask the king to exile you."—"No, not you, Monseigneur, I am well aware; but—"—"But Madame; well, so far as that goes, I do not say that it is not the case. What the deuce did you do or say to Madame?"

"Really, Monseigneur—"—"Women I know have their grudges, and my wife is not free from caprices of that nature. But if she were the cause of your being exiled, I bear you no ill-will."—"In that case, Monseigneur," said De Guiche, "I am not unhappy altogether." Manicamp, who was following closely behind De Guiche, and who did not lose a word of what the prince was saying, bent down to his very shoulders over his horse's neck, in order to conceal the laughter he could not repress.

"Besides, your exile started a project in my head."—"Good."—"When the chevalier, finding that you were no longer here, and sure of reigning undisturbed, began to bully me, I, observing that my wife, in the most perfect contrast to that wicked fellow, was most kind and amiable towards me, who had neglected her so much, conceived the idea of becoming a model husband,—a rarity, a curiosity, at the court; and I had an idea of getting very fond of my wife." De Guiche looked at the prince with an air of amazement, which was not assumed. "Oh, Monseigneur," he stammered tremblingly, "surely that idea did not seriously occur to you?"

"Indeed, it did. I have some property that my brother gave me on my marriage. My wife has some money of her own, and not a little either; for she gets money from her brother and brother-in-law,—from England and France. Well, we should have left the court. I should have retired to my château at Villers-Cotterets, which is part of my appanage, situated in the middle of a forest, in which we should have led a most sentimental life in the very same spot where my grandfather, Henry IV., lived with La Belle Gabrielle. What do you think of that idea, De Guiche?"—"Why, it is enough to make one shudder, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, who shuddered in reality.

"Ah! I see that you would never be able to endure being exiled a second time."—"I, Monseigneur?"—"I will not carry

you off with us, then, as I had at first intended."—"What! with you, Monseigneur?"—"Yes, if the idea should again occur to me of taking a dislike to the court."—"Oh, do not let that make any difference, Monseigneur! I would follow your Highness to the end of the world."—"Clumsy fellow that you are!" growled Manicamp, pushing his horse towards De Guiche so as almost to unseat him; and then, as Manicamp passed close to him, as if he had lost his command over the horse, he whispered, "For goodness' sake, think what you are saying!"

"Well, it is agreed, then," said the prince; "since you are so devoted to me, I shall take you with me."—"Anywhere, everywhere, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, in a joyous tone,—"whenever you like, and at once too. Are you ready?" De Guiche laughingly gave his horse the rein, and galloped forward a few yards.

"One moment," said the prince. "Let us go to the château first."—"What for?"—"Why, to take my wife, of course!"—"What for?" asked De Guiche.—"Why, since I tell you that it is a project of conjugal affection, it is necessary that I should take my wife with me."—"In that case, Monseigneur," replied the count, "I am greatly concerned, but no De Guiche for you."—"Bah!"—"Yes. Why do you take Madame with you?"—"Because I begin to see that I love her," said the prince.

De Guiche turned slightly pale, but endeavoured to preserve his seeming gaiety. "If you love Madame, Monseigneur," he said, "that ought to be quite enough for you, and you have no further need of your friends."—"Not bad, not bad," murmured Manicamp.—"There! your fear of Madame has begun again," replied the prince.

"Why, Monseigneur, I have experienced that to my cost,—a woman who was the cause of my being exiled!"—"What a horrible disposition you have, De Guiche! How terribly you bear malice!"—"I should like the case to be your own, Monseigneur."—"Decidedly, then, that was the reason why you danced so badly yesterday; you wished to revenge yourself, I suppose, by trying to make Madame make a mistake in her dancing. Ah! that is very paltry, De Guiche, and I will tell Madame of it."

"You can tell her whatever you please, Monseigneur; for her highness cannot hate me more than at present."—"Nonsense! you are exaggerating; and this merely because of the fortnight's sojourn in the country which she imposed on you."—"Monseigneur, a fortnight is a fortnight; and when the time

was passed in being bored, a fortnight is an eternity!"—"So that you will not forgive her?"—"Never!"

"Come, come, De Guiche, be a better-disposed fellow than that! I wish to make your peace with her. You will find in conversing with her that she has no malice or unkindness in her nature, and that she is full of intelligence."—"Monseigneur—"—"You will see that she can receive her friends like a princess, and laugh like a citizen's wife; you will see that when she pleases she can make the hours pass away like minutes. De Guiche, my friend, you must really make up your differences with my wife."—"Upon my word," said Manicamp to himself, "here is a husband whose wife's name will bring him ill-luck; and King Candaules of old was a veritable tiger beside his royal highness."

"At all events," added the prince, "you will make it up with my wife, De Guiche,—I am sure you will! Only, I must show you how. There is nothing commonplace about her, and it is not every one who takes her fancy."—"Monseigneur—"—"No resistance, De Guiche, or I shall get out of temper," replied the prince.—"Well, since he will have it so," murmured Manicamp in De Guiche's ear, "do as he wants you to do."—"Well, Monseigneur," said the count, "I will obey."

"And to begin," resumed the prince, "there will be cards this evening in Madame's apartment; you will dine with me, and I will take you there with me."—"Oh! as for that, Monseigneur," objected De Guiche, "you will allow me to decline."—"What! again? This is positive rebellion!"—"Madame received me too indifferently yesterday, before the whole court."—"Really!" said the prince, laughing.

"Nay; so much so, indeed, that she did not even answer me when I addressed her. It may be a good thing to be wanting in self-love; but too little is too little, as the saying is."—"Count, after dinner you will go to your own apartments and dress yourself, and then you will come to go with me. I shall wait for you."—"Since your Highness absolutely commands it—"—"Positively."—"He'll not let go his hold," said Manicamp; "these are the things to which husbands cling most obstinately. Ah, what a pity M. Molière could not have heard this man! He would have put him into verse."

The prince and his court, chatting in this manner, returned to the coolest apartments of the château. "By the by," said De Guiche, as they were standing by the door, "I had a commission for your royal Highness."—"Execute it, then."—

"M. de Bragelonne has by the king's order set out for London, and he charged me with his respects for you, Monseigneur."—"A pleasant journey to the viscount, whom I like very much. Go and dress yourself, De Guiche, and come back for me. If you don't come back—"—"What will happen then, Monseigneur?"—"I will get you thrown into the Bastille."

"Well," said De Guiche, laughing, "his royal highness Monsieur is decidedly the counterpart of her royal highness Madame: Madame gets me sent into exile because she does not care for me sufficiently, and Monsieur gets me imprisoned because he cares for me too much. I thank Monsieur, and I thank Madame."—"Come, come!" said the prince; "you are a delightful companion, and you know well that I cannot do without you. Return as soon as you can."—"Very well; but I am inclined to be a little whimsical myself, Monseigneur."—"Bah!"

"So that I will not return to your royal Highness except upon one condition."—"Name it."—"I want to oblige the friend of one of my friends."—"What's his name?"—"Malicorne."—"An ugly name."—"But very well borne, Monseigneur."—"That may be. Well?"

"Well, I owe M. Malicorne a place in your household, Monseigneur."—"What kind of place?"—"Any kind of place,—a supervision of some sort or other, for instance."—"That happens very fortunately, for yesterday I dismissed my master of apartments."—"That will do admirably, Monseigneur. What are his duties?"—"Nothing, except to look about and make his report."—"A sort of interior police?"—"Exactly."—"Ah, how excellently that will suit Malicorne!" Manicamp ventured to say.

"You know the person of whom we are speaking, M. Manicamp?" inquired the prince.—"Intimately, Monseigneur: I am the friend in question."—"And your opinion is—"—"That your Highness will never have another master of apartments equal to him."—"How much does the appointment bring in?" inquired the count of the prince.

"I haven't the least idea; but I have always understood that he could make as much as he pleased when he was well occupied."—"What do you call being well occupied, Prince?"—"It means, of course, when the functionary in question is a man with his wits about him."—"In that case I think your Highness will be content; for Malicorne is as sharp as the devil himself."—"Good! The appointment will be an expensive one for me

in that case," replied the prince, laughing. "You are making me a positive present, Count."—"I believe so, Monseigneur."

"Well, go and announce to your M. Mélicorne—"—"Malicorne, Monseigneur."—"I shall never get hold of that name."—"You say Manicamp very well, Monseigneur."—"Oh, I shall say Manicorne very well too! Custom will help me."—"Say what you like, Monseigneur, I can promise you that your inspector of apartments will not be annoyed; he is of the happiest disposition possible."—"Well, then, my dear De Guiche, inform him of his nomination. But, stay—"—"What is it, Monseigneur?"

"I wish to see him beforehand; if he be as ugly as his name, I retract what I have said."—"Your Highness knows him, for you have already seen him at the Palais-Royal; nay, indeed, it was I who presented him to you."—"Ah, I remember now,—not a bad-looking fellow."—"I knew that you must have noticed him, Monseigneur."—"Yes, yes, yes. You see, De Guiche, I do not wish that either my wife or myself should have ugly faces before our eyes. My wife will have all her maids of honour pretty; I, all the gentlemen about me good-looking. In this way, De Guiche, you see that any children we may have will run a good chance of being pretty; we shall have had handsome models before us."

"Most powerfully argued, Monseigneur," said Manicamp, showing his approval by look and voice at the same time. As for De Guiche, he very probably did not find the argument so convincing; for he merely signified his opinion by a gesture, which moreover exhibited in a marked manner great indecision of mind on the subject. Manicamp went off to inform Malicorne of the good news he had just learned. De Guiche seemed very unwilling to take his departure for the purpose of making his court toilet. Monsieur, singing, laughing, and admiring himself, passed away the time until the dinner-hour in a frame of mind which would have justified the proverb, "Happy as a prince."

CHAPTER CXXX

STORY OF A NAIAD AND OF A DRYAD

EVERY one had partaken of the banquet at the château, and had afterwards dressed for the court. The usual hour for the banquet was five o'clock. If we say, then, that it occupied an hour, and the toilet two hours, it will appear that everybody was ready at about eight o'clock in the evening. Towards eight o'clock, then, the guests began to arrive at Madame's; for we have already intimated that it was Madame who "received" that evening. At Madame's *soirées* no one failed to be present; for the evenings passed in her apartments had always that perfect charm about them which the queen, that pious and excellent princess, had not been able to confer upon her assemblies. It is unfortunately one of the qualities of goodness to be less amusing than malicious wit. And yet, let us hasten to add that such a style of wit could not be attributed to Madame; for her disposition of mind, naturally of the very highest order, comprised too much true generosity, too many noble impulses and elevated thoughts, to justify any one in calling her ill-natured. But Madame was endowed with a spirit of resistance, —a gift very frequently fatal to its possessor, for he is broken where another would have bent; the result was that blows did not become deadened upon her as upon what might be termed the wadded feelings of Maria Theresa. Her heart rebounded at each attack; and like those aggressive quintains of the ring game, even if she were struck in a manner almost to stun her, she returned blow for blow to any one who might be imprudent enough to venture to tilt against her. Was this really waywardness of disposition, or was it simply malice? We regard those rich and powerful natures as like the tree of knowledge, producing good and evil at the same time: a double branch, always blooming and fruitful, the good fruit of which is distinguished by those who hunger for it, but which yields poison for the worthless and wicked, who die of it,—a thing not to be regretted. Madame, then, who had in her mind a well-digested plan of constituting herself the second, if not even the principal queen of the court, rendered her receptions delightful to all, by the conversation, the opportunities of meeting, and the perfect liberty which she allowed to every one of making any remark he pleased, on the condition, however, that the remark was

amusing or sensible. It will easily be believed that for that very reason there was less talking at Madame's than elsewhere. Madame hated loquacious people, and took a very cruel revenge upon them, for she allowed them to talk. She disliked pretension, too, and never overlooked that defect, even in the king himself. That was Monsieur's complaint, and the princess had undertaken the tremendous task of curing him of it. As for the rest, poets, wits, beautiful women, all were received by her with the air of a mistress superior to her slaves,—sufficiently meditative in her liveliest humours to make poets meditate; sufficiently pretty to dazzle by her attractions, even among the prettiest; sufficiently witty for the most distinguished persons present to listen to her with pleasure. It will be seen that such assemblies as were held in Madame's apartments must have been very attractive. All who were young flocked there; and when the king himself happens to be young, everybody at court is so too. And so the older ladies of the court, the strong-minded women of the regency or of the last reign, pouted and sulked at their ease; but others answered these fits of sulkiness by laughing at those venerable individuals who had carried the love of authority so far as even to have taken the command of bodies of soldiers in the war of the Fronde, in order, as Madame asserted, not to lose their influence over men altogether.

As eight o'clock struck, her royal Highness entered the great drawing-room with her ladies of honour, and found several gentlemen belonging to the court already there, having been waiting for some minutes. Among those who had arrived before the hour fixed for the reception she looked around for the one who she thought ought to have been the first in attendance, but she did not find him there. However, almost at the very moment she had completed her investigation, Monsieur was announced. Monsieur was splendid to behold. All the precious stones and jewels of Cardinal Mazarin, which of course that minister could not do otherwise than leave; all the queen-mother's jewels, as well as a few others belonging to his wife,—Monsieur wore them all, and he was as dazzling as the sun.

Behind Monsieur followed De Guiche, with hesitating steps, and with an air of contrition admirably assumed. De Guiche wore a costume of French-grey velvet, embroidered with silver, and trimmed with blue ribbons; he wore also Mechlin lace, as rare and beautiful of its sort as were the jewels of Monsieur. The plume in his hat was red. Madame, too, wore several colours; she preferred red for hangings, grey for dresses, and

blue for flowers. M. de Guiche, dressed as we have described, looked so handsome that he excited every one's observation. With an interesting pallor of complexion, a languid expression of the eyes, his white hands seen through the masses of lace which covered them, the melancholy expression of his mouth,—it was only necessary, indeed, to see M. de Guiche to admit that few men at the court of France could equal him. The consequence was that Monsieur, who was pretentious enough to fancy that he could eclipse a star even, if it should place itself in competition with him, was, on the contrary, completely eclipsed in every one's fancy,—which is a very silent judge certainly, but very positive and high in its judgment. Madame had looked at De Guiche without expression; but vague as her look had been, it had brought a delightful colour to his face. In fact, Madame had thought De Guiche so handsome and so admirably dressed that she almost ceased regretting the royal conquest which she felt was on the point of escaping her. Her heart, therefore, in spite of herself, sent the blood to her face.

Monsieur, assuming his most determined air, approached her. He had not noticed the princess's blush; or if he had seen it, he was far from attributing it to its true cause. "Madame," he said, kissing his wife's hand, "there is some one present here who has fallen into disgrace,—an unhappy exile, whom I would venture to recommend to your kindness. Do not forget, I beg, that he is one of my best friends, and that your kind reception of him will please me greatly."—"Of what exile, what disgraced person are you speaking?" inquired Madame, looking all round her and not permitting her glance to rest on the count more than on the others.

This was the moment to present his *protégé;* and the prince drew aside to let De Guiche pass him, who with a tolerably well-assumed awkwardness of manner approached Madame and made his reverence to her. "What!" exclaimed Madame, as if she were greatly surprised; "is M. le Comte de Guiche the disgraced individual you speak of, — the exile?" — "Yes, certainly," returned the prince.—"Indeed," said Madame, "there is no one else here."

"You are unjust, Madame," said the prince.—"I?"—"Certainly. Come, forgive the poor fellow."—"Forgive him what? What have I to forgive M. de Guiche?"—"Come, explain yourself, De Guiche! What do you wish to be forgiven?" inquired the prince.—"Alas! her royal highness knows very well what it is," replied the latter, in a hypocritical tone.

"Come, come, give him your hand, Madame!" said Philip.—"If it will give you any pleasure, Monsieur;" and with a movement of her eyes and shoulders which it would be impossible to describe, Madame extended the young man her beautiful and perfumed hand, upon which he pressed his lips.

Apparently the count lingered a little, and Madame did not withdraw her hand too quickly; for the prince added: "De Guiche is not wickedly disposed, Madame; and he certainly will not bite you." A pretext was given in the gallery by Monsieur's remark, which was not perhaps very laughable, for every one to laugh hilariously. The situation was odd enough, and some kindly disposed persons had observed it. Monsieur was still enjoying the effect of his remark, when the king was announced.

The appearance of the room at this moment we will try to describe. In the centre, before the fireplace, which was filled with flowers, Madame was standing, with her maids of honour formed in two wings on either side of her, around whom the butterflies of the court were fluttering. Several other groups occupied the recesses of the windows, like soldiers stationed in their different towers who belong to the same garrison; and from their respective places they could overhear the remarks which proceeded from the principal group. From one of these groups, the nearest to the fireplace, Malicorne, who had been at once, through Manicamp and De Guiche, raised to the dignity of the post of master of the apartments, and whose official costume had been ready for the last two months, was brilliant with gold lace, and shone upon Montalais, standing on Madame's extreme left, with all the fire of his eyes and all the splendour of his velvet. Madame was conversing with Mademoiselle de Châtillon and Mademoiselle de Créqui, who were next to her, and addressed a few words to Monsieur, who drew aside as soon as the king was announced. Mademoiselle de la Vallière, like Montalais, was on Madame's left hand, and the last but one on the line, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente being on her right. She was stationed, as are certain bodies of troops whose weakness is suspected, and who are placed between two experienced regiments. Thus flanked by her two companions who had shared her adventure, La Vallière, whether from regret at Raoul's departure, or still suffering from the emotion caused by recent events which had begun to render her name familiar on the lips of the courtiers,—La Vallière, we repeat, hid her eyes, somewhat red with weeping, behind her fan, and seemed to give the

greatest attention to the remarks which Montalais and Athenaïs alternately whispered to her from time to time.

As soon as the king's name was announced, a general movement took place in the drawing-room. Madame, in her character as hostess, rose to receive the royal visitor; but as she rose, notwithstanding her preoccupation of mind, she glanced hastily towards her right. Her glance, which the presumptuous De Guiche regarded as intended for himself, rested, as it swept over the whole circle, upon La Vallière, whose vivid blush and restless emotion it immediately perceived. The king advanced to the middle of the group, which had now become a general one by a movement that took place, of course, from the circumference to the centre. Every head bowed low before his Majesty, the ladies bending like frail and magnificent lilies before the King Aquilo. There was nothing very severe, we will even say nothing very royal, that evening about the king, except, however, his youth and good looks. He wore an air of animated joyousness and good-humour which set all imaginations at work; and thereupon all present promised themselves a delightful evening, for no other reason than the apparent desire of his Majesty to amuse himself at Madame's assembly.

If there was any one in particular whose high spirits and good-humour could equal the king's, it was M. de Saint-Aignan, who was dressed in a rose-coloured costume, with face and ribbons of the same colour,—particularly rose-coloured in his ideas, for that evening M. de Saint-Aignan was prolific in ideas. The circumstance which had given a new expansion to the numerous schemes germinating in his cheerful mind was that he had just perceived that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was, like himself, dressed in rose-colour. We would not wish to say, however, that the wily courtier had not known beforehand that the beautiful Athenaïs was to wear that particular colour; for he very well knew the art of unlocking the lips of a dressmaker or maid as to her mistress's intentions. He cast as many killing glances at Mademoiselle Athenaïs as he had bows of ribbon on his hose and doublet,—in other words, an immense number.

The king having paid Madame the customary compliments, and Madame having requested him to be seated, the circle was immediately formed. Louis inquired of Monsieur the particulars of the day's bathing; and stated, looking at the ladies while he spoke, that certain poets were engaged in turning into verse the enchanting diversion of the baths of Valvins, and that one of them particularly, M. Loret, seemed to have been entrusted

with the confidence of some water-nymph, as he had in his verses recounted many circumstances that were actually true,—at which remark more than one lady present felt herself bound to blush. The king at this moment took the opportunity of looking round him more leisurely. Montalais was the only one who did not blush sufficiently to prevent her looking at the king, and she saw him fix his eyes most devouringly upon Mademoiselle de la Vallière. This undaunted maid of honour, Mademoiselle de Montalais, be it understood, forced the king to lower his gaze, and so saved Louise de la Vallière from a sympathetic warmth of feeling which this gaze might possibly have awakened. Louis was appropriated by Madame, who overwhelmed him with inquiries,—and no one in the world knew how to ask questions better than she. He tried, however, to render the conversation general, and with the view of effecting this he redoubled his wit and his devotion to her. Madame coveted complimentary remarks, and determined to procure them at any cost, she addressed herself to the king, saying, "Sire, your Majesty, who is aware of everything which occurs in your kingdom, ought to know beforehand the verses confided to M. Loret by this nymph; will your Majesty kindly communicate them to us?"

"Madame," replied the king, with perfect grace of manner, "I dare not.—you, personally, might be in no little degree confused at having to listen to certain details. But De Saint-Aignan tells a story tolerably well, and has a perfect recollection of the verses; if he does not remember them, he will invent. I can certify him to be almost a poet himself." De Saint-Aignan, thus brought prominently forward, was compelled to introduce himself as advantageously as possible. Unfortunately, however, for Madame, he thought of his own personal affairs only; in other words, instead of paying Madame the compliments which she so much desired and relished, his mind was fixed upon making as much display as possible of his own good fortune. Again glancing, therefore, for the hundredth time at the beautiful Athenaïs, who put into practice her theory of the previous evening,—that is, did not deign to look at her adorer,—he said, "Sire, your Majesty will perhaps pardon me for having too indifferently remembered the verses which the nymph dictated to Loret; but if the king has not retained any recollection of them, what could I possibly remember?"

Madame did not receive this shortcoming of the courtier very favourably. "Ah! Madame," added De Saint-Aignan, "at present it is no longer a question what the water-nymphs have

to say; and one would almost be tempted to believe that nothing of any interest now occurs in those liquid realms. It is upon the earth, Madame, that important events happen. Ah! Madame, upon the earth how many tales there are full of—"—"Well," said Madame, "and what is taking place upon the earth?"—"That question must be asked of the dryads," replied the count; "the dryads inhabit the forests, as your royal Highness is aware."

"I am aware, also, that they are naturally very talkative, M. de Saint-Aignan."—"Such is the case, Madame; but when they say only delightful things, it would be ungracious to accuse them of being too talkative."—"Do they talk so delightfully, then?" inquired the princess, indifferently. "Really, M. de Saint-Aignan, you excite my curiosity; and if I were the king, I would require you immediately to tell us what the delightful things are which these dryads have been saying, since you alone seem to understand their language."—"I am perfectly at his Majesty's orders, Madame, in that respect," replied the count, quickly.

"What a fortunate fellow this Saint-Aignan is, to understand the language of the dryads!" said Monsieur.—"I understand it perfectly, Monseigneur, as I do my own language."—"Tell us all about them, then," said Madame.

The king felt embarrassed; for his confidant was in all probability about to launch forth upon a delicate subject. He foresaw it in the general attention excited by De Saint-Aignan's preamble, and aroused too by Madame's peculiar manner. The most reserved of those who were present seemed ready to devour every syllable the count was about to pronounce. They coughed, drew closer together, looked curiously at certain of the maids of honour, who in order to support with greater propriety or with more steadiness the fixity of the inquisitorial looks bent upon them adjusted their fans accordingly, and assumed the bearing of a duellist who is about to be exposed to his adversary's fire.

At this epoch the fashion of ingeniously constructed discourse and hazardously dangerous recitals so prevailed that at the point where in modern times a whole company assembled in a drawing-room would begin to suspect some scandal or disclosure or tragic event and would hurry away in dismay, Madame's guests quietly settled themselves in their places, in order not to lose a word or gesture of the comedy composed by M. de Saint-Aignan for their benefit, the *dénouement* of which,

whatever the style and the plot might be, must as a matter of course be marked by the most perfect propriety. The count was known as a man of extreme refinement and an admirable narrator. He courageously began, then, amid a profound silence which would have been formidable to any one but himself: "Madame, by the king's permission, I address myself, in the first place, to your royal Highness, since you admit yourself to be the person present possessing the greatest curiosity. I have the honour, therefore, to inform your royal Highness that the dryad more particularly inhabits the hollows of oaks; and as dryads are mythological creatures of great beauty, they inhabit the most beautiful trees,—in other words, the largest to be found."

At this exordium, which recalled under a transparent veil the celebrated story of the royal oak which had played so important a part in the last evening, so many hearts began to beat, both from mirth and uneasiness, that if De Saint-Aignan had not had a good and sonorous voice, their throbbings might have been heard above the sound of his voice. "There must surely be dryads at Fontainebleau, then," said Madame, in a perfectly calm voice; "for I have never in all my life seen finer oaks than in the royal park;" and as she spoke, she directed towards De Guiche a look of which he had no reason to complain, as he had of the one that preceded it,—which, as we have already mentioned, had a character of indefiniteness most painful to so loving a heart as his. "Precisely, Madame; it is of Fontainebleau that I was about to speak to your royal Highness," said De Saint-Aignan; "for the dryad whose story is engaging our attention lives in the park belonging to the château of his Majesty."

The narrative was fairly entered upon; the action was begun, and it was no longer possible for audience or narrator to draw back. "It will be worth listening to," said Madame; "for the story not only appears to me to have all the charm of a national incident, but still more seems to be a circumstance of very recent occurrence."

"I ought to begin at the beginning," said the count. "In the first place, then, there live at Fontainebleau, in a fine-appearing cottage, two shepherds. The one is the shepherd Tyrcis, the owner of extensive domains transmitted to him from his parents by right of inheritance. Tyrcis is young and handsome, and his many qualifications make him the first and foremost among the shepherds in the whole country; one might

even boldly say that he is the king of them." A subdued murmur of approbation encouraged the narrator, who continued: "His strength equals his courage; no one displays greater address in hunting wild beasts, nor greater wisdom in matters where judgment is required. Whenever he mounts and exercises his horse on the beautiful plains of his inheritance, or whenever he joins with the shepherds who owe him allegiance, in different games of skill and strength, one might say that it is the god Mars darting his lance on the plains of Thrace, or, even better, that it is Apollo himself, the god of day, radiant upon earth, bearing his flaming darts in his hand." Every one understood that this allegorical portrait of the king was not the worst exordium that the narrator could have chosen; and it did not fail to produce its effect, either upon the audience, which from duty or inclination applauded it to the very echo, or upon the king himself, to whom flattery was very agreeable when delicately conveyed, and whom indeed it did not always displease even when it was a little too broad.

De Saint-Aignan then continued: "It is not in games of glory only, ladies, that the shepherd Tyrcis has acquired that reputation by which he is regarded as the king of shepherds." —"Of the shepherds of Fontainebleau," said the king, smilingly, to Madame.—"Oh!" exclaimed Madame, "Fontainebleau is selected arbitrarily by the poet; but I should say, of the shepherds of the whole world." The king forgot his part of a passive auditor, and bowed.

"It is," pursued De Saint-Aignan, amid a flattering murmur of applause,—"it is, above all, with the fair that the qualities of this king of the shepherds are most prominently displayed. He is a shepherd with a mind as refined as his heart is pure; he can pay a compliment with a charm of manner whose fascination it is impossible to resist; and in his attachments he is so discreet that his lovely and happy conquests may regard their lot as more than enviable. Never a syllable of disclosure, never a moment's forgetfulness! Whoever has seen and heard Tyrcis must love him; whoever loves and is beloved by him, has indeed found happiness." De Saint-Aignan here paused. He was enjoying the pleasures of his own compliments; and the portrait he had drawn, however grotesquely inflated it might be, had found favour in certain ears, for whom the perfections of the shepherd did not seem to have been exaggerated. Madame begged the orator to continue.

"Tyrcis," said the count, "had a faithful companion, or

rather a devoted servant, whose name was—Amyntas."—"Ah!" said Madame, archly, "now for the portrait of Amyntas; you are such an excellent painter, M. de Saint-Aignan."—"Madame—"—"Oh, Comte de Saint-Aignan, do not, I entreat you, sacrifice poor Amyntas! I should never forgive you."

"Madame, Amyntas is of too humble a position, particularly beside Tyrcis, for his person to be honoured by a parallel. There are certain friends who resemble those servants of ancient times who suffered themselves to be buried alive at their masters' feet. Amyntas's place, too, is at the feet of Tyrcis. He cares for no other; and if sometimes the illustrious hero—"—"Illustrious shepherd, do you mean?" said Madame, pretending to correct M. de Saint-Aignan.

"Your royal Highness is right; I made a mistake," returned the courtier. "If, I say, the shepherd Tyrcis deigns occasionally to call Amyntas his friend and to open his heart to him, it is an unparalleled favour, which the latter regards as the most unbounded felicity."—"All that you say," interrupted Madame, "establishes the extreme devotion of Amyntas to Tyrcis, but does not furnish us with the portrait of Amyntas. Count, do not flatter him, if you like; but describe him to us. I will have Amyntas's portrait."

De Saint-Aignan obeyed, after having bowed profoundly to his Majesty's sister-in-law. "Amyntas," he said, "is somewhat older than Tyrcis. He is not an altogether ill-favoured shepherd; it is even said that the Muses condescended to smile upon him at his birth, even as Hebe smiled upon youth. He is not ambitious to shine, but he is ambitious of being loved; and he might not perhaps be found unworthy of it, if he were only sufficiently well known." This latter sentence, strengthened by a very killing glance, was directed straight to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who met the shock unmoved. But the modesty and tact of the allusion had produced a good effect. Amyntas reaped the benefit of it in the applause bestowed on him; Tyrcis's head had even given the signal for it by a consenting nod full of good-will.

"One evening," continued De Saint-Aignan, "Tyrcis and Amyntas were walking together in the forest, talking of their love disappointments. Do not forget, ladies, that the story of the dryad is now beginning; otherwise it would be easy to tell you what Tyrcis and Amyntas, the two most discreet shepherds of the whole earth, were talking about. They had reached the thickest part of the forest for the purpose of being quite alone

and of confiding their troubles more freely to each other, when suddenly the sound of voices struck upon their ears."

"Ah, ah!" said those who surrounded the narrator. "Nothing can be more interesting than this." At this point Madame, like a vigilant general inspecting his army, glanced at Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were drooping under the strain. "These harmonious voices," resumed De Saint-Aignan, "were those of certain shepherdesses, who had been likewise desirous of enjoying the coolness of the shade, and who, knowing the isolated and almost unapproachable situation of the place, had betaken themselves thither to interchange their ideas upon the sheepfold."

A loud burst of laughter, occasioned by this remark of De Saint-Aignan, and an imperceptible smile of the king as he looked at Tonnay-Charente, followed this sally. "The dryad affirms positively," continued De Saint-Aignan, "that the shepherdesses were three in number, and that all were young and beautiful."—"What were their names?" said Madame, quietly.—"Their names?" said De Saint-Aignan, who hesitated from the fear of committing an indiscretion.

"Of course! You called your shepherds Tyrcis and Amyntas; give your shepherdesses names in a similar manner."—"Oh, Madame, I am not an inventor, an improvisator; I relate simply what took place, as the dryad related it to me."—"What did your dryad, then, call these shepherdesses? You have a very treacherous memory, I fear. This dryad must have fallen out with the goddess Mnemosyne."—"These shepherdesses, Madame— Pray remember that it is a crime to betray a woman's name."—"From which a woman absolves you, Count, on condition that you reveal the names of the shepherdesses."—"Their names were Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea."—"Very well; they have not lost by the delay," said Madame, "for we have three charming names. But now for their portraits."

De Saint-Aignan again started. "Nay, Count, let us proceed in due order," returned Madame. "Ought we not, Sire, to have the portraits of the shepherdesses?" The king, who expected this determined perseverance and who began to feel some uneasiness, did not think it safe to provoke so dangerous an interrogator. He thought, too, that De Saint-Aignan in drawing the portraits would find a means of insinuating some flattering allusions which would be agreeable to the ears of one whom his Majesty was interested in pleasing. It was with this hope and

with this fear that Louis authorised De Saint-Aignan to sketch the portraits of the shepherdesses,—Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea. "Very well, then, be it so," said De Saint-Aignan, like a man who has made up his mind; and he began.

CHAPTER CXXXI

CONCLUSION OF THE STORY OF A NAIAD AND OF A DRYAD

"PHYLLIS," said De Saint-Aignan, with a glance of defiance at Montalais, such as a fencing-master would give who invites an antagonist worthy of him to place himself on his guard,—"Phyllis is neither fair nor dark, neither tall nor short, neither too grave nor too gay; though but a shepherdess, she is as witty as a princess and as coquettish as a demon. Nothing can equal her excellent vision. Her heart yearns for everything that her gaze embraces. She is like a bird, which, always warbling, at one moment skims along the grass, at the next rises fluttering in pursuit of a butterfly, then perches upon the topmost branch of a tree, where it defies the bird-catchers either to come and seize it or to entice it into their nets." The portrait bore such a strong resemblance to Montalais that all eyes were directed towards her. She, however, with her head raised and with a steady unmoved look, listened to M. de Saint-Aignan as if he were speaking of some one who was a complete stranger to her. "Is that all, M. de Saint-Aignan?" inquired the princess.

"Oh, your royal Highness, the portrait is a mere sketch, and many additions could be made; but I am afraid of wearying your Highness's patience, or offending the modesty of the shepherdess, and I shall therefore pass on to her companion, Amaryllis."—"Very well," said Madame, "pass on to Amaryllis, M. de Saint-Aignan; we are all attention."—"Amaryllis is the eldest of the three, and yet," De Saint-Aignan hastened to add, "this advanced age does not reach twenty years." Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had slightly knitted her brows at the beginning of the description, unbent them with a faint smile.

"She is tall, with an immense quantity of hair, which she dresses in the manner of the Grecian statues. Her walk is full of majesty, her attitude haughty. She has the air, therefore, of a goddess rather than of a mere mortal; and among the goddesses she most resembles Diana the huntress,—with this

sole difference, however, that the cruel shepherdess, having one day stolen the quiver of Love while poor Cupid was sleeping in a thicket of roses, instead of directing her arrows against the denizens of the forest, discharges them most pitilessly against all the poor shepherds who pass within reach of her bow."—"Oh, what a wicked shepherdess!" said Madame. "She may some day wound herself with one of those arrows which she discharges, as you say, so mercilessly on all sides."—"It is the hope of all the shepherds in general," said De Saint-Aignan.—"And that of the shepherd Amyntas in particular, I suppose?" said Madame.

"The shepherd Amyntas is so timid," returned De Saint-Aignan, with the most modest air he could assume, "that if he cherishes such a hope as that, no one has ever known anything about it, for he conceals it in the very depths of his heart." A flattering murmur of applause greeted the narrator's profession of faith on the part of the shepherd.

"And Galatea?" inquired Madame. "I am impatient to see a hand so skilful as yours continue the portrait where Virgil left it, and finish it before our eyes."—"Madame," said De Saint-Aignan, "beside the great Virgilius Maro your humble servant is indeed but a very poor poet. Still, encouraged by your desire, I will do my best." De Saint-Aignan extended his foot and his hand, and gave the following florid description: "White as milk, she casts upon the breeze the perfume of her fair hair, tinged with golden hues, as are the ears of corn. One is tempted to inquire if she is not the beautiful Europa, who inspired Jupiter with the tender passion as she played with her companions in the flower-bespangled meadows. From her eyes, blue as the azure heavens in the brightest summer day, emanates a tender light, which reverie feeds and which love dispenses. When she frowns, or bends her looks towards the ground, the sun is veiled in token of mourning. When she smiles, on the contrary, Nature resumes her joyousness; and the birds, which had for a moment been silenced, recommence their songs amid the leafy covert of the trees. Galatea," said De Saint-Aignan, in conclusion, "is worthy of the adoration of the whole world; and if she should ever bestow her heart upon another, happy will that mortal be whom by the gift of her virgin affections she condescends to make immortal."

Madame, who had attentively listened to the portrait De Saint-Aignan had drawn, as indeed had all the others, contented herself by indicating her approbation of the most poetic passages

by occasional inclinations of her head; but it was impossible to say whether these marks of assent had been accorded to the ability of the narrator or to the likeness of the portrait. The consequence, therefore, was that as Madame did not openly exhibit any approbation no one felt authorised to applaud,—not even Monsieur, who secretly thought that De Saint-Aignan dwelt too much upon the portraits of the shepherdesses after having somewhat slightingly passed over the portraits of the shepherds. The whole assembly seemed suddenly chilled. De Saint-Aignan, who had exhausted his rhetorical skill and his artist's brush in sketching the portrait of Galatea, and who, after the favour with which his other descriptions had been received, already imagined he could hear the loud applause for this last one, was himself more chilled than the king and the rest of the company. A moment's silence followed, which was at last broken by Madame. "Well, Sire," she inquired, "what is your Majesty's opinion of these three portraits?"

The king, who wished to relieve De Saint-Aignan's embarrassment without compromising himself, replied, "Why, Amaryllis, in my opinion, is beautiful."—"For my part," said Monsieur, "I like Phyllis better; she is a capital girl, or rather a good-sort-of-fellow of a nymph." A general laugh followed; and this time the looks were so direct that Montalais felt herself blushing almost scarlet.

"Well," resumed Madame, "what were those shepherdesses saying to one another?" De Saint-Aignan, however, whose vanity had been wounded, did not feel himself in a position to sustain an attack of new and refreshed troops, and merely said, "Madame, the shepherdesses were confiding to one another their little preferences."—"Nay, nay! M. de Saint-Aignan, you are a perfect stream of pastoral poesy," said Madame, with an amiable smile, which somewhat comforted the narrator.

"They confessed that love is a great peril, but that the absence of love is the heart's sentence of death."—"What was the conclusion they came to?" inquired Madame.

"They came to the conclusion that one ought to love."—"Very good! Did they lay down any conditions?"—"That of choice, simply," said De Saint-Aignan. "I ought even to add—remember it is the dryad who is speaking—that one of the shepherdesses (Amaryllis, I believe) was completely opposed to the necessity of loving, and yet she did not positively deny that she had allowed the image of a certain shepherd to be impressed upon her heart."—"Was it Amyntas or Tyrcis?"

"Amyntas, Madame," said De Saint-Aignan, modestly. "But Galatea,—the gentle and soft-eyed Galatea—immediately replied that neither Amyntas nor Alphesibœus nor Tityrus, nor indeed any of the handsomest shepherds of the country, were to be compared to Tyrcis; that Tyrcis was as superior to all other men as the oak in its grandeur to all other trees, as the lily in its majesty to all other flowers. She even drew such a portrait of Tyrcis that Tyrcis himself, who was listening, must have felt truly flattered by it, notwithstanding his rank and position. Thus Tyrcis and Amyntas had been distinguished by Amaryllis and Galatea; and thus had the secrets of two hearts been revealed beneath the shades of evening and amid the recesses of the woods. Such, Madame, is what the dryad related to me,—she who knows all that takes place in the hollows of oaks and in grassy dells; she who knows the loves of the birds, and all they wish to convey by their songs; she who understands, in fact, the language of the wind among the branches, the humming of the insects with their golden and emerald wings in the corolla of the wild-flowers;—it was she who related the particulars to me, and I repeat them."

"And now you have finished, M. de Saint-Aignan, have you not?" said Madame, with a smile which made the king tremble. —"Quite finished," replied De Saint-Aignan, "and only too happy if I have been able to amuse your Highness for a few moments."—"Moments which have been too brief," replied the princess, "for you have related most admirably all you knew; but, my dear M. de Saint-Aignan, you have been unfortunate enough to obtain your information from one dryad only, I believe?"—"Yes, Madame, only from one, I confess."

"The fact was that you passed by a little naiad, who pretended to know nothing at all, and yet knew a great deal more than your dryad, my dear Count."—"A naiad!" repeated several voices, the expectation being aroused that the story was going to have a continuation.

"Of course! Close beside the oak of which you were speaking, which, if I am not mistaken, is called the royal oak— Is it not so, M. de Saint-Aignan?" De Saint-Aignan and the king exchanged glances. "Yes, Madame," the former replied.— "Well, close beside the oak there is a pretty little spring, which runs murmuringly on over the pebbles, amid the forget-me-nots and daisies."

"I believe you are correct," said the king, still with some uneasiness, and listening eagerly to his sister-in-law's narrative.

—"Oh, there is one, I can assure you!" said Madame; "and the proof of it is that the naiad who rules over that little stream stopped me as I was about to cross."—"Bah!" said De Saint-Aignan.—"Yes, indeed," continued the princess; "and she did so in order to communicate to me many particulars which M. de Saint-Aignan omitted in his recital."—"Pray relate them yourself," said Monsieur; "you can relate stories in such a charming manner."

The princess bowed at the conjugal compliment paid her. "I do not possess the poetical powers of the count, nor his ability to bring out all the details."—"You will not be listened to with less interest on that account," said the king, already perceiving that something hostile was intended in his sister-in-law's story.

"I speak, too," continued Madame, "in the name of that poor little naiad, who is indeed the most charming creature I ever met. Moreover, she laughed so heartily while she was telling me her story, that, in pursuance of that medical axiom that laughter is contagious, I ask permission to laugh a little myself when I recollect her words." The king and De Saint-Aignan, who noticed spreading over many faces a beginning of the laughter which Madame announced, finished by looking at each other, as if asking whether there were not some little conspiracy concealed beneath her words. But Madame was determined to turn the knife in the wound over and over again; she therefore resumed with an air of the most perfect innocence, —in other words, with the most dangerous of all her airs,— "Well, then, I passed that way; and as I found beneath my steps many fresh flowers newly blown, no doubt Phyllis, Amaryllis, Galatea, and all your shepherdesses had passed the same way before me."

The king bit his lips, for the recital was becoming more and more threatening. "My little naiad," continued Madame, "was murmuring her plaintive little song in the bed of her rivulet. As I perceived that she accosted me by touching the hem of my robe, I did not think of receiving her advances ungraciously; and more particularly so since, after all, a divinity, even though of inferior rank, is always of greater importance than a mortal, though a princess. I thereupon accosted the naiad; and bursting into laughter, this is what she said to me, 'Fancy, Princess—' You understand, Sire, it is the naiad who is speaking." The king bowed assentingly; and Madame resumed: "'Fancy, Princess, the banks of my little stream

have just witnessed a most amusing scene. Two shepherds full of curiosity, even indiscreetly so, have allowed themselves to be mystified in the merriest manner by three nymphs or three shepherdesses.' I beg your pardon, but I do not now remember if it were nymphs or shepherdesses she said; but it does not much matter, so we will continue."

The king at this opening coloured visibly; and De Saint-Aignan, completely losing countenance, began to open his eyes in the greatest possible anxiety. "'The two shepherds,' pursued my little naiad, still laughing, 'followed in the wake of the three young ladies,'—no, I mean, of the three nymphs; forgive me, I ought to say, of the three shepherdesses. It is not always wise to do that, for it may be awkward for those who are followed. I appeal to all the ladies present; and not one of them, I am sure, will contradict me." The king, who was much disturbed by what he suspected was about to follow, signified his assent by a gesture. "'But,' continued the naiad, 'the shepherdesses had noticed Tyrcis and Amyntas gliding into the wood, and by the light of the moon they had recognised them through the grove of trees.' Ah, you laugh!" interrupted Madame; "wait, you are not yet at the end."

The king turned pale. De Saint-Aignan wiped his forehead, which was bedewed with perspiration. Among the groups of ladies could be heard smothered laughter and stealthy whispers. "'The shepherdesses, I was saying, noticing how indiscreet the two shepherds were, proceeded to sit down at the foot of the royal oak; and when they perceived that their indiscreet listeners were sufficiently near, so that not a syllable of what they were about to say could be lost, they made to them very innocently, in the most innocent manner in the world indeed, a passionate declaration, which from the vanity natural to all men, and even to the most sentimental of shepherds, seemed to the two listeners as sweet as the honeycomb.'"

The king at these words, which the assembly was unable to hear without laughing, could not restrain a flash of anger darting from his eyes. As for De Saint-Aignan, he let his head fall upon his breast, and concealed under a bitter laugh the extreme annoyance he felt. "Oh," said the king, drawing himself up to his full height, "upon my word, that is a most amusing jest certainly, and as told by you, Madame, has lost none of its charm; but really and truly, are you sure you quite understood the language of the naiads?"—"The count, Sire,

pretends to have perfectly understood that of the dryads," retorted Madame, spiritedly.

"No doubt," said the king. "But you know the count has the weakness to aspire to become a member of the Academy; so that, with this object in view, he has learned all sorts of things of which very happily you are ignorant; and it might possibly happen that the language of the nymph of the waters might be among the number of things which you have not studied."—"You know, Sire," replied Madame, "that for facts of that nature one does not altogether rely upon one's self alone; a woman's ear is not infallible, so says Saint Augustine. I therefore wished to satisfy myself by other opinions besides my own; and as my naiad, who in her character of a goddess is polyglot— Is not that the expression, M. de Saint-Aignan?"—"Yes," said the latter, quite out of countenance.—"Well," continued the princess, "as my naiad in her character of goddess had at first spoken to me in English, I feared, as you suggest, that I might have misunderstood her; and I requested Mesdemoiselles de Montalais, de Tonnay-Charente, and de la Vallière to come to me, begging my naiad to repeat to me in the French language the recital she had already communicated to me in English."

"And did she do so?" inquired the king.—"Oh, she is the most obliging divinity that exists! Yes, Sire, she did so; so that no doubt whatever remains on the subject. Is it not so, Mesdemoiselles?" said the princess, turning towards the left of her army; "did not the naiad say precisely what I have related, and have I in any one particular exceeded the truth? Phyllis,—I beg your pardon, I mean Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais,—is it true?"—"Oh, precisely, Madame!" articulated Mademoiselle de Montalais, very distinctly.

"Is it true, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente?"—"The perfect truth," replied Athenaïs, in a voice quite as firm, but yet not so distinct.—"And you, La Vallière?" asked Madame. The poor girl felt the king's ardent look fixed upon her; she dared not deny it, she dared not tell a falsehood, and so bowed her head simply in token of assent. Her head, however, was not raised again, half chilled as she was by a coldness more bitter than that of death.

This triple testimony overwhelmed the king. As for De Saint-Aignan, he did not even attempt to dissemble his despair, and hardly knowing what he said, stammered out, "An excellent jest! admirably played, Mesdemoiselles shepherdesses."—

"A just punishment for curiosity," said the king, in a hoarse voice. "Oh! who would think, after the chastisement that Tyrcis and Amyntas suffered, of endeavouring to surprise what is passing in the heart of shepherdesses? Assuredly, I shall not, for one; and you, Messieurs?"—"Nor I! nor I!" repeated, in a chorus, the group of courtiers.

Madame was filled with triumph at the king's annoyance; and was full of delight, thinking that her story had been, or was to be, the termination of the whole matter. As for Monsieur, who had laughed at the two stories without comprehending anything about them, he turned towards De Guiche, and said to him, "Well, Count, you say nothing; can you not find something to say? Do you pity M. Tyrcis and M. Amyntas, perchance?"—"I pity them with all my soul," replied De Guiche; "for, in very truth, love is so sweet a fancy that to lose it, fancy though it may be, is to lose more than life itself. If, therefore, these two shepherds thought themselves beloved,—if they were happy in that idea, and if instead of that happiness they meet with not only that empty void which resembles death, but with jeers and jests at that love, which is worse than a hundred thousand deaths,—in that case I say that Tyrcis and Amyntas are the two most unhappy men I know."

"And you are right, too, M. de Guiche," said the king; "for, in fact, the death we speak of is a very hard return for a little curiosity."—"That is as much as to say, then, that the story of my naiad has displeased the king?" asked Madame, innocently.—"Nay, Madame, undeceive yourself," said Louis, taking the princess by the hand. "Your naiad, on the contrary, has pleased me; and the more so, because she has been more truthful, and because her tale, I ought to add, is confirmed by the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses."

These words fell upon La Vallière accompanied by a look that no one, from Socrates to Montaigne, could have exactly defined. The look and the words succeeded in overpowering the unhappy girl, who with her head upon Montalais's shoulder seemed to have fainted away. The king rose without remarking this circumstance, of which no one moreover took any notice; and contrary to his usual custom, for generally he remained late in Madame's apartments, he took his leave, and retired to his own side of the palace. De Saint-Aignan followed him, leaving the rooms in as great a state of despair as he had entered them in a state of delight. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, less sensitive to emotion than La Vallière, was not much

frightened, and did not faint. However, the last look of De Saint-Aignan had hardly been so majestic as the last look of the king.

CHAPTER CXXXII

ROYAL PSYCHOLOGY

THE king returned to his apartments with hurried steps. The reason he walked as fast as he did was probably to avoid tottering in his gait. He seemed to leave behind him as he went along a trace of a mysterious sorrow. That gaiety of manner which every one had remarked in him on his arrival, and which all had been delighted to perceive, had not perhaps been understood in its true sense; but his stormy departure, his disordered countenance, all knew, or at least thought they could easily comprehend. Madame's levity of manner, her pleasantries,—somewhat rough for any one, especially so for a king,—and the too familiar identification of the king with an ordinary man were among the reasons which the assembly assigned for the precipitate and unexpected departure of Louis XIV. Madame, keen-sighted enough in other respects, did not, however, at first see anything extraordinary in it. It was quite sufficient for her to have inflicted some slight wound upon the vanity or self-esteem of one who, so soon forgetting the engagements he had contracted, seemed to have undertaken to disdain without cause the noblest and highest prizes. It was not an unimportant matter for her, in the present position of affairs, to let the king perceive the difference which existed between the bestowal of his affections on one in a high station and the running after some passing fancy, like a younger son fresh from the provinces. By indulging in amours of the higher class, having in view their dignity and power, and preserving in them a certain formality and ostentation, a monarch not only did not act in a manner derogatory to his high position, but found even a repose, security, mystery, and general respect therein. On the contrary, in the debasement of vulgar intrigues, he would encounter, even among his meanest subjects, carping and sarcastic remarks; he would forfeit his character of infallibility and inviolability. Having descended to the region of petty human miseries, he would be subjected to its paltry contentions. In a word, to convert the royal divinity into a mere mortal by striking at his heart, or rather even at his face, like the meanest of his subjects, was to

inflict a terrible blow upon the pride of that generous nature. Louis was more easily captivated by vanity than by love. Madame had wisely calculated her vengeance, and, as has been seen, she obtained it.

Let it not be supposed, however, that Madame possessed such terrible passions as the heroines of the Middle Ages possessed, or that she regarded things from a serious point of view; on the contrary, Madame, young, amiable, of cultivated intellect, coquettish, loving in her nature,—but rather from fancy or imagination or ambition than from her heart,—Madame, we say, on the contrary, inaugurated that epoch of light and fleeting amusements which distinguished the hundred and twenty years that intervened between the middle of the seventeenth century and the last quarter of the eighteenth. Madame saw, therefore, or rather fancied that she saw, things under their true aspect. She knew that the king, her august brother-in-law, had been the first to ridicule the humble La Vallière, and that, in accordance with his usual custom, it was hardly probable he would ever love the person who had excited his laughter, even had it been only for a moment. Moreover, was not her vanity present,—that evil influence which plays so important a part in that comedy of dramatic incidents called the life of a woman? Did not her vanity tell her, aloud, in a subdued voice, in a whisper, in every variety of tone, that she could not, in reality,—she a princess, young, beautiful, and rich,—be compared with the poor La Vallière, as youthful as herself, it is true, but far less pretty certainly, and utterly poor? And there is nothing surprising in this; for it is known that the greatest characters are those who flatter themselves the most in the comparison they draw between themselves and others, between others and themselves.

It may perhaps be asked, What was Madame's motive for an attack which had been so skilfully combined? Why was there such a display of forces, if it were not seriously the intention to dislodge the king from a heart that had never been occupied before, in which he seemed disposed to take refuge? Was there any necessity, then, for Madame to attach so great an importance to La Vallière, if she did not fear her? No; Madame did not regard La Vallière from that point of view in which an historian, who knows everything, sees into the future, or rather the past. Madame was neither a prophetess nor a sibyl; nor could she, any more than another, read what was written in that terrible and fatal book of the future, which guards in its most secret pages the most serious events. No;

Madame desired simply to punish the king for having availed himself of secret means altogether feminine in their nature. She wished to prove to him clearly that if he made use of offensive weapons of that nature, she, a woman of ready wit and high descent, would assuredly discover, in the arsenal of her imagination, defensive weapons proof even against the thrusts of a monarch. Moreover, she wished him to learn that in a warfare of that description kings are held of no account, or, at all events, that kings who fight on their own behalf, like ordinary individuals, may witness the fall of their crown in the first encounter; and that, in fact, if he had expected to be adored by all the ladies of the court from the very first, from a confident reliance on his mere appearance, it was a pretension which was most preposterous, and insulting even towards certain persons who filled a higher position than others; and that a lesson taught in season to this royal personage, who assumed too high and haughty a carriage, would be rendering him a great service.

Such, indeed, were Madame's reflections with respect to the king. The event itself was not thought of. And with this purpose it has been seen that she had exercised her influence over the minds of her maids of honour, and with all its accompanying details had arranged the comedy which had just been acted. The king was completely bewildered by it; for the first time since he had escaped from the trammels of M. de Mazarin, he found himself treated as a man. A similar severity from any of his subjects would have been at once resisted by him. *Les pouvoirs croissent dans la lutte.* But to attack women, to be attacked by them, to have been imposed upon by mere girls from the country, who had come from Blois expressly for that purpose,—it was the depth of dishonour for a young sovereign full of that vanity with which his personal advantages and his royal power inspired him. There was nothing he could do; he could resort neither to reproaches nor exile, nor could he show the annoyance he felt. To show any vexation would have been to admit that he had been touched, like Hamlet, by a sword from which the button had been removed,—the sword of ridicule. To show vexation towards women, what humiliation!—especially when the women in question have laughter on their side as a means of vengeance. Oh! if instead of leaving all the responsibility of the affair to these women, one of the courtiers had had anything to do with the intrigue, how delightedly would Louis XIV. have seized the opportunity of

turning the Bastille to account! But there again the king's anger paused, checked by reason. To be the master of armies, of prisons, of an almost divine authority, and to exert that almost almighty power in the service of a petty grudge, would be unworthy not only of a monarch, but even of a man.

It was necessary, therefore, simply to swallow the affront in silence, and to wear his usual gentleness and graciousness of expression. It was necessary to treat Madame as a friend. As a friend!—and why not? Either Madame had been the instigator of the affair, or the affair itself had found her passive. If she had been the instigator of it, it certainly was a bold measure on her part; but, at all events, it was only natural in her. Who was it that had sought her in the earliest moments of her honeymoon, to whisper words of love in her ear? Who was it that had dared to calculate the possibility of committing a crime against the marriage vow,—a crime, too, still more deplorable on account of the relationship between them? Who was it that, shielded behind his royal omnipotence, had said to this young woman, "Be not afraid; love but the King of France, who is above all, and a movement of whose sceptred hand will protect you against all attacks, even from your own remorse?" And she had listened to and obeyed the royal voice, had been influenced by his ensnaring tones; and now that she had, morally speaking, sacrificed her honour in listening to him, she saw herself repaid for her sacrifice by an infidelity the more humiliating, since it was occasioned by a woman far beneath her own station,—she who at first had thought that she was beloved. Had Madame, therefore, been the instigator of the revenge, she would have been right. If, on the contrary, she had remained passive in the whole affair, what grounds had the king to be angry with her on that account? Was it for her to restrain, or rather could she restrain, the chattering of a few country girls; and was it for her, by an excess of zeal which might have been misinterpreted, to check, at the risk of increasing it, the impertinence of their conduct? All these various reasonings were like so many actual stings to the king's pride; but when he had carefully in his own mind gone over all his causes for complaint, Louis XIV. was surprised, upon due reflection,—in other words, after the wound had been dressed,—to find that there were other causes of suffering, secret, unendurable, and unrevealed. There was one circumstance which he dared not confess even to himself; namely, that the acute pain from which he was suffering had its seat in his heart.

The fact is, he had permitted his heart to be gratified by La Vallière's innocent confession. He had dreamed of a pure affection,—of an affection for Louis the man, and not the sovereign,—of an affection free from all self-interest; and his heart, more youthful and more simple than he had imagined it to be, had bounded forward to meet that other heart which had just revealed itself to him by its aspirations.

The commonest thing in the complicated history of love is the double inoculation of love to which any two hearts are subjected; the one loves nearly always before the other, and the latter almost always follows the example. In this way the electric current is established, in proportion to the intensity of the passion which is first kindled. The more Mademoiselle de la Vallière had shown her affection, the more the king's affection had increased. And it was precisely that which had surprised his Majesty. For it had been fairly demonstrated to him that no sympathetic current could have been the means of hurrying his heart away in its course, because there had been no confession of love in the case; because the confession was, in fact, an insult towards the man and towards the sovereign; and finally, because—and the word, too, burned like a hot iron,—because, in fact, it was nothing but a hoax, after all. This girl, therefore, who in strictness could not lay claim to beauty or birth or great intelligence,—who had been selected by Madame herself on account of her unpretending qualities,—had not only aroused the king's regard, but had moreover treated him with disdain,—him, the king, a man who, like an Eastern potentate, had but to bestow a glance, to indicate with his finger, to drop his handkerchief. And since the previous evening his mind had been so absorbed with this girl that he could think and dream of nothing but her. Since the previous evening his imagination had been occupied by clothing her image with all those charms to which she could not lay claim. In very truth, he whom such vast interests summoned, and whom so many women smiled upon invitingly, had since the previous evening consecrated every moment of his time, every throb of his heart, to this sole dream. It was, indeed, either too much or not enough.

The indignation of the king, making him forget everything, and among others that De Saint-Aignan was present, was poured out in the most violent imprecations. True it is that De Saint-Aignan had taken refuge in a corner of the room, and from his corner regarded the tempest passing over. His own personal disappointment seemed contemptible, in comparison with the

anger of the king. He compared with his own petty vanity the prodigious pride of offended majesty; and being well read in the hearts of kings in general, and in those of powerful kings in particular, he began to ask himself if this weight of anger, as yet held in suspense, would not soon terminate by falling upon his own head, for the very reason that others were guilty, and he innocent.

In point of fact, the king all at once did arrest his hurried pace; and fixing a look full of anger upon De Saint-Aignan, suddenly cried out, "And you, De Saint-Aignan?" De Saint-Aignan made a movement which was intended to signify, "Well, Sire?" "Yes; you have been as silly as myself, I think."—"Sire!" stammered De Saint-Aignan.

"You permitted yourself to be deceived by this shameful trick."—"Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, whose agitation was such as to make him tremble in every limb, "let me entreat your Majesty not to exasperate yourself. Women, you know, are creatures full of imperfections, created for the misfortune of others; to expect anything good from them is to require them to do impossibilities."

The king, who had the greatest consideration for himself, and who had begun to acquire over his emotions that command which he preserved over them all his life, perceived that he was doing an outrage to his own dignity in displaying so much animation about so trifling an object. "No," he said hastily; "you are mistaken, De Saint-Aignan. I am not angry; I can only wonder that we should have been turned into ridicule so cleverly and with such boldness by these two young girls. I am particularly surprised that, although we might have been accurately informed on the subject, we were silly enough to leave the matter for our own hearts to decide upon."—"The heart, Sire, is an organ which requires positively to be reduced to its physical functions, which must be deprived of all moral functions. For my own part, I confess that when I saw that your Majesty's heart was so taken up by this little—"

"My heart taken up! I! My mind might perhaps have been so; but as for my heart, it was—" Louis again perceived that in order to cover one gap he was about to disclose another. "Besides," he added, "I have no fault to find with the girl. I was quite aware that she was in love with some one else."—"The Vicomte de Bragelonne. I informed your Majesty of the circumstance."—"You did so; but you were not the first who told me. The Comte de la Fère had solicited from me Mademoi-

selle de la Vallière's hand for his son; and on his return from England the marriage shall be celebrated, since they love each other."

"I recognise in that all the generosity of the king."—"So, Saint-Aignan, we will cease to occupy ourselves with these matters any longer," said Louis.—"Yes, we will digest the affront, Sire," replied the courtier, with resignation.—"Besides, it will be a very easy matter to do so," said the king, checking a sigh.

"And by way of a beginning, I will set about the composition of some good epigram upon the trio. I will call it 'The Naiad and the Dryad,' which will please Madame."—"Do so, Saint-Aignan!" said the king, indifferently. "You shall read me your verses; they will amuse me. Ah! it is of no use, Saint-Aignan," added the king, like a man breathing with difficulty; "the blow requires more than human strength to bear it in a dignified manner."

As the king thus spoke, assuming an air of the most angelic patience, one of the servants in attendance knocked gently at the door. De Saint-Aignan drew aside, out of respect. "Come in," said the king. The servant partially opened the door. "What is it?" inquired Louis. The servant held out a letter folded in a triangular shape. "For your Majesty," he said.—"From whom?"—"I do not know. One of the officers on duty gave it to me." The valet, on a sign from the king, handed him the letter. The king advanced towards the candles, opened the note, read the signature, and uttered a loud cry.

De Saint-Aignan was sufficiently respectful not to look on; but without doing so, he saw and heard all, and ran towards the king, who with a gesture dismissed the servant. "Oh, heavens!" said the king, as he read the note.—"Is your Majesty unwell?" inquired De Saint-Aignan, stretching forward his arms.—"No, no, Saint-Aignan,—read!" and he handed him the note. De Saint-Aignan's eyes fell upon the signature. "La Vallière!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Sire!"

"Read, read!" And De Saint-Aignan read:

"Forgive my importunity, Sire; forgive, especially, the want of formality in this letter. A note seems to me more speedy and more urgent than a despatch. I venture, therefore, to address my note to your Majesty. I have returned to my own room, overcome with grief and fatigue, Sire; and I implore of your Majesty the favour of an audience, in which I may tell the truth to my king. LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE."

"Well?" asked the king, taking the letter from De Saint-Aignan's hands, who was completely bewildered by what he had just read.—"Well!" repeated De Saint-Aignan.

"What do you think of it?"—"I hardly know."—"Still, what is your opinion?"—"Sire, the young lady must have heard the muttering of the thunder, and has got frightened."—"Frightened at what?" asked Louis, with dignity.

"Why, your Majesty has a thousand reasons to be angry with the author or authors of so hazardous a joker, and if your Majesty's memory were to be awakened in a disagreeable sense, it would be a perpetual menace hanging over the head of this imprudent girl."—"Saint-Aignan, I do not think as you do."—"Your Majesty doubtless sees more clearly than I do."—"Well! I see affliction and restraint in these lines, and more particularly since I recollect some of the details of the scene which took place this evening in Madame's apartments. In fact—" The king suddenly stopped, leaving his meaning unexpressed.

"In fact," resumed De Saint-Aignan, "your Majesty will grant an audience; nothing is clearer than that in the whole affair."—"I will do better still, Saint-Aignan."—"What is that, Sire?"—"Put on your cloak!"—"But, Sire—"—"You know the room where Madame's maids of honour are lodged?"—"Certainly."—"You know some means of obtaining an entrance there?"—"Oh, as to that, no!"

"At all events, you must be acquainted with some one there."—"Indeed, your Majesty has suggested a very good idea."—"You do know some one, then? Who is it?"—"I know a certain gentleman who is on very good terms with a certain young lady there."—"One of the maids of honour?"—"Yes, Sire."—"With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, I suppose?" said the king, laughing.

"Unfortunately, no, Sire; with Montalais."—"What is his name?"—"Malicorne."—"And you can depend on him?"—"I believe so, Sire. He ought to have a key of some sort in his possession; and if he should happen to have one, as I have done him a service, why, he will return it."—"Nothing could be better. Let us set off, then."—"I am at your Majesty's service." The king threw his own cloak over De Saint-Aignan's shoulders, asked him for his, and then both went out into the vestibule.

CHAPTER CXXXIII

SHOWING WHAT NEITHER THE NAIAD NOR THE DRYAD HAD ANTICIPATED

De Saint-Aignan stopped at the foot of the staircase which led to the *entresol*, where the maids of honour resided, and to the first floor, where Madame's apartments were situated. Then, by a valet who was passing, he sent to summon Malicorne, who was still with Monsieur. After having waited ten minutes, Malicorne arrived, looking very suspicious and important. The king drew back towards the darkest part of the vestibule. De Saint-Aignan, on the contrary, advanced to meet Malicorne; but at the first words indicating his wish that person drew back abruptly.—"Oh!" he said, "you want me to introduce you into the rooms of the maids of honour?"—"Yes."—"You know very well that I cannot do anything of the kind, without being made acquainted with your object."

"Unfortunately, my dear M. Malicorne, it is quite impossible for me to give you any explanation; you must therefore confide in me as in a friend who got you out of a great difficulty yesterday, and who now begs you to extricate him from one to-day."—"Yet I told you, Monsieur, what I wanted,—that I did not wish to sleep in the open air,—and any honest man might express the same wish; while you, on the contrary, admit nothing."—"Believe me, my dear M. Malicorne," De Saint-Aignan persisted, "that if I were permitted to explain myself, I would do so."

"In that case, my dear Monsieur, it is impossible for me to allow you to enter Mademoiselle de Montalais's apartment."—"Why so?"—"You know why better than any one else, since you caught me on the wall paying my addresses to Mademoiselle de Montalais; it would therefore be an excess of kindness on my part, you will admit, while I am paying attentions to her, to open the door of her room to you."

"But who told you that it was on her account I asked you for the key?"—"For whom, then?"—"She does not lodge there alone, I suppose?"—"No, certainly not."—"She rooms with Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"—"Yes. But really you have nothing more to do with Mademoiselle de la Vallière than with Mademoiselle de Montalais; and there are only two men

to whom I would give this key,—to M. de Bragelonne, if he begged me to give it to him, and to the king, if he ordered me to do so."

"In that case give me the key, Monsieur; I order you to do so," said the king, advancing from the obscurity and partially opening his cloak. "Mademoiselle de Montalais will step down to talk with you, while we go upstairs to Mademoiselle de la Vallière; for, in fact, it is she only whom we require."—"The king!" exclaimed Malicorne, bowing down to the very ground.

"Yes, the king," said Louis, smiling,—"the king, who is as pleased with your resistance as with your capitulation. Rise, Monsieur, and render us the service we request of you."—"I obey, your Majesty," said Malicorne, leading the way up the staircase.

"Get Mademoiselle de Montalais to come down," said the king, "and do not breathe a word to her of my visit." Malicorne bowed in sign of obedience, and proceeded up the staircase. But the king, after hasty reflection, followed him, and with such rapidity that although Malicorne was already more than half-way up the staircase, the king reached the room at the same moment that he did. He then observed, by the door which remained half open behind Malicorne, La Vallière, lying back in an arm-chair, and in the opposite corner Montalais, who in her dressing-gown was standing before a large mirror, engaged in arranging her hair, and parleying all the while with Malicorne. The king hurriedly opened the door, and entered the room. Montalais called out at the noise made by the opening of the door, and recognising the king, made her escape. La Vallière, at the sight of him, rose from her seat, like a dead person who had been galvanised, and then fell back again in her arm-chair. The king advanced slowly towards her. "You wished for an audience, Mademoiselle," he said coldly; "I am ready to hear you. Speak!"

De Saint-Aignan, faithful to his character of being deaf, blind, and dumb, had stationed himself in a corner of the doorway, upon a stool which chance seemed to have left there expressly for him. Concealed by the tapestry which served as a portière, and leaning his back against the wall, in this way he listened without being seen; resigning himself to playing the part of a good watch-dog, who patiently waits and watches without ever getting in his master's way. La Vallière, terror-stricken at the king's irritated aspect, again rose, and assuming a posture full of humility and entreaty, murmured, "Forgive

me, Sire."—"Eh! Mademoiselle, for what do you wish me to forgive you?" asked Louis.—"Sire, I have been guilty of a great fault; nay, more than a great fault,—a great crime."—"You?"—"Sire, I have offended your Majesty."—"Not the slightest degree in the world," replied Louis.

"I implore you, Sire, not to maintain towards me that terrible seriousness of manner which reveals your Majesty's just anger. I feel that I have offended you, Sire; but I wish to show you that I have not offended you of my own accord."—"In the first place, Mademoiselle," said the king, "in what way can you possibly have offended me? I cannot perceive how. Surely not on account of a young girl's harmless and very innocent jest? You turned the credulity of a young man into ridicule,—it was very natural to do so; any other woman in your place would have done the same."

"Oh! your Majesty overwhelms me by your words."—"And why so?"—"Because, if I had been the author of the jest, it would not have been innocent."—"Well, Mademoiselle, is that all you had to say to me in soliciting an audience?" said the king, as though about to turn away.

Thereupon La Vallière, in an abrupt and broken voice, her eyes burning with her hot tears, made a step towards the king, and said, "Did your Majesty hear everything?"—"Everything, what?"—"Everything I said beneath the royal oak."—"I did not lose a syllable, Mademoiselle."—"And when your Majesty heard me, could you have thought I had abused your credulity?"—"Credulity; yes, indeed, you have selected the very word."

"And your Majesty did not suppose that a poor girl like myself might possibly be compelled to submit to the will of others?"—"Forgive me," returned the king; "but I shall never be able to understand that she, who of her own free will could express herself so unreservedly beneath the royal oak, would allow herself to be influenced to such an extent by the direction of others."—"But the threat held out against me, Sire!"—"Threat! who threatened you? who dared to threaten you?"—"They who have the right to do so, Sire."—"I do not recognise any one as possessing the right to threaten in my kingdom."

"Forgive me, Sire; but near your Majesty, even, there are persons sufficiently high in position to have, or to believe that they have, the right to ruin a young girl without expectation, without fortune, and with only her reputation."—"In what

way ruin her?"—"In depriving her of her reputation by disgracefully expelling her from the court."—"Oh, Mademoiselle de la Vallière," said the king, bitterly, "I prefer those persons who exculpate themselves without incriminating others."—"Sire!"

"Yes; and I confess that I greatly regret to perceive that an easy justification, as your own might be, should have been complicated in my presence by a tissue of reproaches and imputations against others."—"And which you do not believe?" exclaimed La Vallière. The king remained silent. "Nay, but tell me!" repeated La Vallière, vehemently.—"I regret to confess it," replied the king, bowing coldly.

The young girl uttered a deep groan, striking her hands together in despair. "You do not believe me, then?" she said to the king, who still answered nothing, while poor La Vallière's features became visibly changed at his continued silence. "Therefore you believe," she said, "that I contrived this ridiculous, this infamous plot of trifling in so shameless a manner with your Majesty?"—"Nay," said the king, "it is neither ridiculous nor infamous,—it is not even a plot; it is merely a jest, more or less amusing, and nothing more."—"Oh!" murmured the young girl, in despair, "the king does not, and will not, believe me?"

"No, indeed, I will not believe you," said the king. "Besides, in point of fact, what can be more natural? The king, you argue, follows me, listens to me, watches me; the king wishes perhaps to amuse himself at my expense. I will amuse myself at his; and as the king is very tender-hearted, I will take his heart by storm." La Vallière hid her face in her hands, as she stifled her sobs. The king continued most pitilessly; he revenged himself upon the poor victim before him for all that he had himself suffered. "Let us invent, then, this story of my loving him and preferring him to others. The king is so simple and so conceited that he will believe me; and then we can go and tell others how credulous the king is, and can enjoy a laugh at his expense."—"Oh!" exclaimed La Vallière, "to think that, to believe that, is frightful!"—"And," pursued the king, "that is not all; if this self-conceited prince should take our jest seriously, if he should be imprudent enough to exhibit before others anything like delight at it, well, in that case, the king will be humiliated before the whole court. And what a delightful story it will be some day for him to whom I am really attached,—a part of my dowry to bring my husband,—to have

the adventure to relate of the king who was so amusingly deceived by a mischievous young girl!"

"Sire!" exclaimed La Vallière, her mind bewildered, almost wandering, indeed, "not another word, I implore you; do you not see that you are killing me?"—"A jest, nothing but a jest!" murmured the king, who however began to be somewhat affected. La Vallière fell upon her knees, and that so violently that the sound could be heard upon the hard floor. Then, clasping her hands, "Sire," she said, "I prefer shame to disloyalty."—"What do you mean?" inquired the king, without moving a step to raise the young girl from her knees.

"Sire, when I shall have sacrificed both my honour and my reason to you, you will perhaps believe in my loyalty. The tale which was related to you in Madame's apartments, and by Madame herself, is utterly false; and that which I said beneath the great oak—"—"Well!"—"That only—that was the truth."

"What!" exclaimed the king.—"Sire," exclaimed La Vallière, hurried away by the violence of her emotions, "were I to die of shame on the very spot where my knees are fixed, I would repeat it until my latest breath; I said that I loved you, and it is true: I do love you."—"You!"—"I have loved you, Sire, from the very first day I saw you; from the moment when at Blois, where I was pining away my existence, your royal looks, full of light and life, were first bent upon me. I love you still, Sire. It is a crime of high treason, I know, that a poor girl like myself should love her sovereign and should presume to tell him so. Punish me for my audacity, despise me for my shameless immodesty; but do not ever say, do not ever think, that I have jested with or deceived you. I belong to a family whose loyalty has been proved, Sire; and I love—I love my king—oh! I am dying!"

Suddenly her strength, voice, and respiration ceased, and she fell forward, like the flower Virgil mentions, which the scythe of the reaper has touched. The king, at these words, at this vehement entreaty, no longer retained either ill-will or doubt in his mind; his whole heart seemed to expand at the glowing breath of that love which proclaimed itself in such noble and courageous language. When he heard the passionate avowal of that love, therefore, his strength seemed to fail him, and he hid his face in his hands. But when he felt La Vallière's hands clinging to his own, when their warm pressure fired his blood, he bent forward, and passing his arm round La Vallière's waist, raised her from the ground and pressed her to his heart. But

she, her head fallen forward on her bosom, seemed to have ceased to live. The king, terrified, called out for De Saint-Aignan.

De Saint-Aignan who had carried his discretion so far as to remain without stirring in his corner, pretending to wipe away a tear, ran forward at the king's summons. He then assisted Louis to seat the young girl upon a couch, chafed her hands, sprinkled some Queen of Hungary water over her face, saying over and over again: "Come, Mademoiselle, it is all over; the king believes you and forgives you. There, there now! take care, or you will agitate his Majesty too much, Mademoiselle; his Majesty is so sensitive, so tender-hearted. Now, really, Mademoiselle, you must pay attention, for the king is very pale." The fact was, the king was visibly losing colour. But La Vallière did not move. "Really, Mademoiselle," continued De Saint-Aignan, "do pray recover, I beg, I implore you; it is really time you should. Think only of one thing, that if the king should become unwell, I should be obliged to summon his physician. What a state of things that would be! So do pray rouse yourself, Mademoiselle; make an effort, quick, quick!"

It was difficult to display more persuasive eloquence than De Saint-Aignan did, but something still more powerful and of a more energetic nature than this eloquence aroused La Vallière. The king, who was kneeling before her, covered the palms of her hands with those burning kisses which are to the hands what a kiss upon the lips is to the face. La Vallière's senses returned to her; she languidly opened her eyes, and with a look of anguish murmured, "Oh, Sire, has your Majesty pardoned me, then?"

The king did not reply, for he was still too much overcome. De Saint-Aignan thought it his duty again to retire; he had observed the flame which leaped from the eyes of his Majesty. La Vallière rose. "And now, Sire," said she, courageously, "that I have justified myself, at least I trust so, in your Majesty's eyes, grant me leave to retire into a convent. I shall bless your Majesty all my life, and I shall die there thanking and loving Heaven for having given me one day of perfect happiness."—"No, no!" replied the king; "you will live here, on the contrary, blessing Heaven, but loving Louis, who will make your existence one of perfect felicity,—Louis, who loves you,—Louis, who swears it."—"Oh, Sire, Sire!"

And upon this doubt of La Vallière, the king's kisses became so warm that De Saint-Aignan thought it his duty to retire behind the tapestry. These kisses, however, which she had not

the strength at first to resist, began to trouble the young girl. "Oh, Sire!" she exclaimed, "do not make me repent my loyalty, for this would show me that your Majesty despises me still."—"Mademoiselle," said the king, suddenly, drawing back with an air full of respect, "there is nothing in the world that I love and honour more than yourself; and nothing in my court, I call Heaven to witness, shall be so highly regarded as you shall be henceforward. I entreat your forgiveness for my transport, Mademoiselle,—it arose from an excess of love; but I can prove to you that I shall love still more while respecting you as much as you can possibly desire." Then bending before her and taking her by the hand, he said to her, "Will you honour me by accepting the kiss I press upon your hand?" And the king's lips were pressed respectfully and lightly upon the young girl's trembling hand. "Henceforth," added Louis, rising and bending his glance upon La Vallière,—"henceforth you are under my safeguard. Do not speak to any one of the injustice I have done you; forgive others that which they may have been able to do you. For the future you shall be so far above all those, that, far from inspiring you with fear, they shall be even beneath your pity;" and he bowed as reverently as though he were leaving a place of worship.

Then calling De Saint-Aignan, who approached with great humility, the king said: "I hope, Count, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière will kindly confer a little of her friendship upon you, in return for that which I have vowed to her eternally." De Saint-Aignan bent his knee before La Vallière, murmuring, "How happy, indeed, would such an honour make me!"

"I shall send your companion back to you," said the king. "Adieu, Mademoiselle, or, rather, *au revoir!* Do not forget me in your prayers, I entreat you."—"Oh, Sire!" said La Vallière, "be assured that you and Heaven are in my heart together." These last words elated the king, who, full of happiness, hurried De Saint-Aignan down the stairs. Madame had not anticipated this *dénouement*, and neither the naiad nor the dryad had said a word about it.

CHAPTER CXXXIV

THE NEW GENERAL OF THE JESUITS

WHILE La Vallière and the king were mingling together, in their first confession of love, all the bitterness of the past, all the happiness of the present, and all the hopes of the future, Fouquet had retired to the apartments which had been assigned to him in the château, and was conversing with Aramis upon the subjects which the king at that moment was forgetting. "Now tell me," began Fouquet, after having installed his guest in an arm-chair and seated himself by his side, "tell me, M. d'Herblay, what is our position with regard to the Belle-Isle affair, and whether you have received any news about it."

"Monsieur the Superintendent," replied Aramis, "everything is going on in that direction as we wish; the expenses have been paid, and nothing has transpired of our designs."—"But what about the soldiers whom the king wished to send there?"—"I received news this morning that they had arrived there a fortnight ago."—"And how have they been treated?"—"In the best manner possible."—"But what has become of the former garrison?"—"The soldiers were landed at Sarzeau, and were sent off at once towards Quimper."—"And the new men?"—"Belong to us at this very moment."

"Are you sure of what you say, my dear M. de Vannes?"—"Quite sure; and, moreover, you will see by and by how matters have turned out."—"Still, you are very well aware that of all the garrison towns Belle-Isle is the very worst."—"I know it, and have acted accordingly; no space to move about, no communications, none of the other sex, no gambling permitted. Well, it is a great pity," added Aramis, with one of those smiles so peculiar to him, "to see how much young people at the present day seek amusement, and how much, consequently, they incline towards the man who procures and pays for such amusements for them."

"But if they amuse themselves at Belle-Isle?"—"If they amuse themselves through the king's means, they will attach themselves to the king; but if they get bored to death through the king's means, and amuse themselves through M. Fouquet, they will be attached to M. Fouquet."

"And you informed my intendant, of course, so that imme-

diately on their arrival—"—"By no means. They were left alone a whole week, to weary themselves at their ease; but at the end of the week they cried out, saying that the last officers amused themselves more than they did. Whereupon they were told that the former officers had been able to make a friend of M. Fouquet, and that M. Fouquet, knowing them to be friends of his, had from that moment done all he possibly could to prevent their getting wearied or bored upon his estates. Upon this they began to reflect. Immediately afterwards, however, the intendant added, that without anticipating M. Fouquet's orders, he knew his master sufficiently well to be aware that he took an interest in every gentleman in the king's service, and that although he did not know the new-comers, he would do as much for them as he had done for the others."

"Excellent! and I trust that the promises were followed up; I desire, as you know, that no promise should ever be made in my name that is not fulfilled."—"Without a moment's loss of time, our two privateers and your own horses were placed at the disposal of the officers; the keys of the principal mansion were handed over to them, so that they made up hunting-parties, and excursions with such ladies as are to be found in Belle-Isle, and such others as they are enabled to enlist from the neighbourhood who have no fear of sea-sickness."—"And there is a fair sprinkling to be met with at Sarzeau and Vannes, I believe, your Grace?"—"Yes; all along the coast," said Aramis, quietly.

"And now, for the soldiers?"—"Everything is precisely the same, in a relative degree, you understand; the soldiers have plenty of wine, excellent provisions, and good pay."—"Very good; so that—"—"So that this garrison can be depended upon, and it is a better one than the last."—"Good."—"The result is, if fortune favours us so that the garrisons are changed in this manner only every two months, that at the end of every three years the whole army will, in its turn, have been there; and therefore, instead of having one regiment in our favour, we shall have fifty thousand men."

"Yes, yes; I knew perfectly well," said Fouquet, "that no friend could be more precious and valuable than yourself, M. d'Herblay. But," he added, laughing, "all this time we are forgetting our friend Du Vallon; what has become of him? During the three days I have spent at St. Mandé, I confess that I have forgotten him completely."—"I do not forget him, however," returned Aramis. "Porthos is at St. Mandé. All his joints are kept well greased; the greatest care is taken with

regard to the food he eats and to the wines he drinks; I have made him take daily airings in the small park which you have kept for your own use, and he makes use of it accordingly. He begins to walk again; he exercises his muscular powers by bending down young elm-trees, or making the old oaks fly into splinters, as Milo of Crotona used to do; and as there are no lions in the park, it is not unlikely we shall find him alive. Our Porthos is a brave fellow."

"Yes; but in the meantime he will get wearied to death."—"He never does that."—"He will be asking questions?"—"He sees no one."—"At all events, he is looking or hoping for something or other?"—"I have inspired in him a hope which we will realise some fine morning; and he subsists on that."—"What is it?"—"That of being presented to the king."

"Oh! oh! in what character?"—"As the engineer of Belle-Isle, of course."—"Is it possible?"—"Quite true."—"Shall we not be obliged, then, to send him back to Belle-Isle?"—"Most certainly; I am even thinking of sending him back as soon as possible. Porthos is very fond of display; he is a man whose weaknesses D'Artagnan, Athos, and myself are alone acquainted with; he never commits himself in any way,—he is dignity itself. To the officers there he would seem like a Paladin of the time of the Crusades. He would make the whole staff drunk without getting so himself, and every one would regard him as an object of admiration and sympathy. If, therefore, we should happen to have any orders requiring to be carried out, Porthos is a living order; and whatever he chose to do, others would find themselves obliged to submit to."

"Send him back, then."—"That is what I intend to do; but not for a few days, for I must not omit to tell you one thing."—"What is it?"—"I begin to suspect D'Artagnan. He is not at Fontainebleau, as you may have noticed; and D'Artagnan is never absent or apparently idle without some object in view. And now that my own affairs are settled, I am going to try to ascertain what are the affairs in which D'Artagnan is engaged."—"Your own affairs are settled, you say?"—"Yes."—"You are very fortunate, in that case; and I should like to be able to say the same."—"I hope you do not make yourself uneasy."—"Hum!"—"Nothing could be better than the king's reception of you."—"True."—"And Colbert leaves you in peace."—"Almost so."

"In that case," said Aramis, with that connection of ideas which constituted his power,—"in that case, then, we can

bestow a thought upon the young girl I was speaking to you about yesterday."—"Whom do you mean?"—"What! have you forgotten already? I mean La Vallière."—"Ah! of course, of course."—"Do you object, then, to try to make a conquest of her?"—"In one respect only; my heart is engaged in another direction, and I positively do not care about the girl in the least."—"Oh!" said Aramis, "your heart is engaged, you say. The deuce! we must take care of that."—"Why?"—"Because it is terrible to have the heart occupied when others, besides yourself, have so much need of the head."

"You are right. So, you see, at your first summons I left everything. But to return to this girl. What good do you see in my troubling myself about her?"—"This: the king has taken a fancy to her; at least, so it is supposed."—"But you, who know everything, know very differently?"—"I know that the king has changed very quickly,—that the day before yesterday he was mad about Madame; that a few days ago Monsieur complained of it to the queen-mother, and that some conjugal misunderstandings and maternal scoldings were the consequence."—"How do you know all that?"—"I do know it; at all events, since these misunderstandings and scoldings the king has not addressed a word, has not paid the slightest attention, to her royal highness."

"Well, what next?"—"Since then he has been taken up with Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Now, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is one of Madame's maids of honour. You happen to know, I suppose, what is called a *chaperon* in matters of love. Well, then, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is Madame's *chaperon*. It is for you, therefore, to take advantage of this state of things. You have no need of that advantage. But, at all events, wounded vanity will render the conquest an easier one; the girl will get hold of the king's and Madame's secret, and you can hardly tell what a man of intelligence can do with a secret."—"But how to get at her?"—"Nay, you, of all men, to ask me such a question!" said Aramis.

"Certainly; I shall not have any time to busy myself with her."—"She is poor and unassuming,—you will create a position for her; and whether she makes the king subject to her as his mistress, or whether she only becomes his confidante, you will have gained a new disciple."—"Very good," said Fouquet. "What is to be done, then, with regard to this girl?"—"Whenever you have taken a fancy to any lady, Monsieur the Superintendent, what steps have you taken?"—"I have written to her,

protesting my devotion to her. I have added, how happy I should be to render her any service in my power, and have signed 'Fouquet' at the end of the letter."—"And has any one offered any resistance?"—"One person only," replied Fouquet; "but four days ago she yielded, as the others had done."

"Will you take the trouble to write?" said Aramis, holding a pen towards Fouquet, which he took, saying: "I will write at your dictation. My head is so taken up in another direction, that I should not be able to write two lines."—"Very well," said Aramis, "write." And he dictated as follows:

"I have seen you, and you will not be surprised to learn how beautiful I have found you. But for want of the position you merit at the court, your presence there is a waste of time. The devotion of a man of honour, should ambition of any kind inspire you, might possibly serve as a means of display for your talents and beauty. I place my devotion at your feet; but as devotion, however humble and discreet it may be, might possibly compromise the object of its worship, it would ill become a person of your merit to run the risk of being compromised, without her future being ensured. If you would deign to accept and reply to my love, my love shall prove its gratitude to you in making you free and independent for ever."

Having finished writing, Fouquet looked at Aramis. "Sign it," said the latter.—"Is it absolutely necessary?"—"Your signature at the foot of that letter is worth a million; you forget that, my dear superintendent." Fouquet signed.

"Now, by whom will you send the letter?" asked Aramis.—"By an excellent servant of mine."—"Can you rely on him?"—"He is a man who has been with me all my life."—"Very well. Besides, in this case, we are not playing for very heavy stakes."—"How so? For if what you say be true of the accommodating disposition of this girl for the king and Madame, the king will give her all the money she can ask for."

"The king has money, then?" asked Aramis.—"I suppose so, for he has not asked me for any more."—"Oh, he will ask for some soon, never fear!"—"Nay, more than that, I had thought he would have spoken to me about the *fête* at Vaux, but he never said a word about it."—"He will be sure to do so, though."

"You must think the king's disposition a very cruel one, M. d'Herblay."—"It is not he who is so."—"He is young, and therefore he is kind."—"He is young, and either he is weak

or his passions are strong; and M. Colbert holds his weaknesses and his passions in his villainous grasp."

"You admit that you fear him?"—"I do not deny it."—"In that case I am lost."—"Why so?"—"My only influence with the king has been through the money I commanded, and now I am a ruined man."

"Not so."—"How 'not so'? Do you know my affairs better than I do?"—"That is not unlikely."—"If he were to request this *fête* to be given?"—"You will give it, of course."—"But where is the money to come from?"—"Have you ever been in want of any?"—"Oh, if you only knew at what cost I procured the last supply!"—"The next shall cost you nothing."—"But who will give it to me?"—"I will."—"What! give me six millions?"—"Ten, if necessary."

"Upon my word, my dear D'Herblay," said Fouquet, "your confidence alarms me more than the king's displeasure. Who can you possibly be, after all?"—"You know me well enough, I should think."—"Of course; but what is it you are aiming at?"—"I wish to see upon the throne of France a king devoted to M. Fouquet, and I wish M. Fouquet to be devoted to me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fouquet, pressing his hand, "as for belonging to you, I am yours entirely; but believe me, my dear D'Herblay, you are deceiving yourself."—"In what respect?"—"The king will never become devoted to me."—"I do not remember to have said that the king would be devoted to you."—"Why, on the contrary, you have this moment said so."—"I did not say the king; I said a king."—"Is it not all the same?"—"No, on the contrary, it is quite different."

"I do not understand you."—"You will shortly, then. Suppose, for instance, the king in question were to be a very different person from Louis XIV."—"Another person?"—"Yes, who is indebted for everything to you."—"Impossible!"—"His very throne even."—"Oh, you are mad! There is no other man but Louis XIV. who can sit on the throne of France. I see none, not one."—"But I see one."—"Unless it be Monsieur," said Fouquet, looking at Aramis uneasily. "Yet Monsieur—"—"It is not Monsieur."—"But how can it be that a prince not of the royal line, that a prince without any right—"

"My king, or rather your king, will be everything that is necessary, be assured of that."—"Be careful, M. d'Herblay; you make my blood run cold, and my head swim." Aramis smiled. "There is but little occasion for that," he replied.—

"Again, I repeat, you terrify me!" said Fouquet. Aramis smiled. "You laugh," said Fouquet.

"The day will come when you will laugh too; only, at the present moment I must laugh alone."—"But explain yourself."—"When the proper day shall have arrived, I will explain all; fear nothing. You are no more Saint Peter than I am the Saviour; and yet I say to you, 'O man of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?'"—"Eh, *mon Dieu!* I cannot but doubt, because I do not see."—"That is because you are blind. I will no longer treat you like Saint Peter, but like Saint Paul, and I will say unto you, 'A day will come when thine eyes shall be opened.'"—"Oh," said Fouquet, "how willingly would I believe!"

"You do not believe!—you who through my means have ten times crossed the abyss yawning at your feet, and in which, had you been alone, you would have been swallowed up! You do not believe!—you who from attorney-general attained the rank of intendant, from the rank of intendant that of first minister of the crown, and who from the rank of first minister will pass to that of mayor of the palace! But, no," he said, with the same unaltered smile, "no, no, you cannot see, and consequently cannot believe that; " and Aramis rose to withdraw.

"One word more," said Fouquet. "You have never yet spoken to me in this manner; you have never yet shown yourself so confident—I should rather say so daring."—"Because it is necessary, in order to speak confidently, to have the lips unfettered."—"And that is now your case?"—"Yes."—"Since a very short time, then?"—"Since yesterday only."—"Oh, M. d'Herblay, take care! Your confidence is becoming audacity."—"One can well be audacious when one is powerful."—"And you are powerful?"—"I have offered you ten millions! I offer them again to you."

Fouquet rose, much agitated and disturbed. "Come, come," he said; "you spoke of overthrowing kings and replacing them by others. God forgive me! but if I am not really out of my senses, is or is not that what you said just now?"—"You are not out of your senses, for it is perfectly true that I did say that just now."—"And why did you say so?"—"Because one may speak in this manner of thrones being cast down and kings being raised up, when one is one's self far above all kings and thrones, of this world at least."—"Your power is infinite, then?" cried Fouquet.—"I have told you so already, and I repeat it," replied Aramis, with glistening eyes and trembling lips.

Fouquet threw himself back in his chair, and buried his face in his hands. Aramis looked at him for a moment, as the angel of human destinies might have looked upon a simple mortal. "Adieu!" he said to him; "sleep undisturbed, and send your letter to La Vallière. To-morrow we shall see each other again." —"Yes, to-morrow," said Fouquet, shaking his head like a man returning to his senses. "But where shall we see each other?" —"At the king's promenade, if you like."—"Very well;" and they separated.

CHAPTER CXXXV

THE STORM

THE dawn of the following day was dark and gloomy; and as every one knew that a ride was set down in the royal programme, every one's gaze, as his eyes opened, was directed towards the sky. Just above the tops of the trees a thick, suffocating vapour seemed to remain suspended, with hardly sufficient power to rise thirty feet above the ground under the influence of the sun's rays, which could barely be seen through the veil of a heavy and thick mist. That morning there was no dew; the turf was dried up for want of moisture, and the flowers were withered. The birds sang less cheerfully than usual amid the boughs, which remained as motionless as death. The strange, confused, and animated murmurs, which seemed born of the sun, and to exist by it,—that respiration of Nature which is unceasingly heard amid all other sounds,—could not be heard now; never had silence been so profound.

The king had noticed the cheerless aspect of the heavens as he approached the window immediately after rising. But as all the directions had been given respecting the drive, and every preparation had been made accordingly, and, what was far more imperious than everything else, as Louis relied upon this excursion to satisfy the cravings of his imagination, and we will even already say the clamorous desires of his heart,—the king unhesitatingly decided that the appearance of the heavens had nothing whatever to do with the matter, and that the excursion having been appointed, should take place, whatever the state of the weather might be. Besides, there are in certain terrestrial realms privileged by Heaven times when it might almost be supposed that the expressed wish of an earthly monarch has its influence

over the Divine will. It was Virgil who observed of Augustus, *Nocte placet tota redeunt spectacula mane.* Louis XIV. had Boileau, who ought to have told him something very different; and the Lord ought to have been as compliant to him as Jove was to Augustus. Louis attended Mass as usual, but it must be confessed that his attention was somewhat distracted from the presence of the Creator by the remembrance of the creature. His mind was occupied during the service in reckoning more than once the number of minutes, then of seconds, which separated him from the blissful moment when the departure would take place,—that is to say, the moment when Madame would set out with her maids of honour. As a matter of course, everybody at the château was ignorant of the interview which had taken place the evening before between La Vallière and the king. Montalais, perhaps, with her usual chattering propensity, might have been disposed to spread it abroad; but Montalais on this occasion was held in check by Malicorne, who had placed upon her lips the padlock of mutual interest.

As for Louis XIV., his happiness was so extreme that he had nearly or quite forgiven Madame her little piece of ill-nature of the previous evening. In fact, he had occasion to congratulate himself about it rather than to complain of it. Had it not been for her ill-natured action, he would not have received the letter from La Vallière; had it not been for the letter, he would have had no interview; and had it not been for the interview, he would have remained undecided. His heart was filled with too much happiness for any ill-feeling to remain in it, at that moment at least. Instead, therefore, of knitting his brows into a frown when he perceived his sister-in-law, Louis resolved to receive her in a still more friendly and gracious manner than usual. But that would be on one condition only,—that she would be ready to set out early. Such was the nature of Louis's thoughts during Mass,—thoughts which made him during the holy service, it must be said, forget matters which in his character of Most Christian King and eldest son of the Church ought to have occupied his attention. Yet God is so kind towards youthful errors,—all which regards love, even blameworthy love, so easily finds forgiveness in his Fatherly eyes,—that on going out from Mass, Louis, raising his eyes to the heavens, could see through the rents in a cloud a strip of the azure carpet which is pressed by the foot of the Almighty. He returned to the château; and as the departure was fixed for midday only, and it was at present just ten o'clock, he set to

work most desperately with Colbert and Lyonne. But even while he worked, Louis went from the table to the window which looked out upon Madame's pavilion; he saw M. Fouquet in the courtyard, to whom the courtiers, since the favour shown him on the previous evening, paid greater attention than ever, and who himself was coming with an affable and extremely cheerful air to present his respects to the king.

The king, instinctively, on noticing Fouquet, turned towards Colbert, who was smiling, and seemed full of benevolence and delight,—a state of feeling which had arisen from the very moment one of his secretaries had entered and handed him a pocket-book which he had put unopened into his pocket. But as there was always something sinister at the bottom of any delight expressed by Colbert, Louis preferred, of the smiles of the two men, those of Fouquet. He beckoned to the superintendent to come up, and then turning towards Lyonne and Colbert, he said: "Finish this matter, place it on my desk, and I will read it at my leisure;" and he left the room.

At the sign the king had made to him, Fouquet had hastened up the staircase, while Aramis, who was with the superintendent, had quietly retired among the group of undistinguished courtiers, and disappeared without having been even observed by the king. The king and Fouquet met at the top of the staircase. "Sire," said Fouquet, remarking the gracious manner in which Louis was about to receive him, "your Majesty has overwhelmed me with kindness during the last few days. It is not a youthful monarch, but a young god, who reigns over France,—the god of pleasure, happiness, and love."

The king coloured. The compliment, although flattering, was not the less somewhat direct. Louis conducted Fouquet to a small room which separated his study from his sleeping apartment. "Do you know why I summoned you?" said the king, as he seated himself upon the edge of the casement, so as not to lose anything that might be passing in the gardens which fronted the opposite entrance to Madame's pavilion.—"No, Sire; but I am sure it was for something agreeable, if I am to judge from your Majesty's gracious smile."

"Ah, you prejudge!"—"No, Sire; I look and I see."—"You are mistaken, then."—"I, Sire?"—"For I summoned you, on the contrary, to pick a quarrel with you."—"With me, Sire?"—"Yes, and that a serious one."—"Really, your Majesty alarms me; and yet I wait most confident in your justice and goodness."

"Do you know, I am told, M. Fouquet, that you are preparing a grand *fête* at Vaux." Fouquet smiled, as a sick man would at the first shiver of a fever which has left him but returns again. "And that you have not invited me!" continued the king.—"Sire," replied Fouquet, "I have not even thought of the *fête* you speak of, and it was only yesterday evening that one of my *friends* [Fouquet laid stress upon the word] was kind enough to make me think of it."

"Yet I saw you yesterday evening, M. Fouquet, and you said nothing to me about it."—"Sire, how dared I hope that your Majesty would so greatly descend from your own exalted station as to honour my dwelling with your royal presence?"—"Excuse me, M. Fouquet, you did not speak to me about your *fête*."—"I did not allude to the *fête* before your Majesty, I repeat, in the first place, because nothing had been decided with regard to it, and, secondly, because I feared a refusal."

"And something made you fear a refusal, M. Fouquet? You see I am determined to push you hard."—"Sire, the profound wish I had that your Majesty should accept my invitation—' "Well, M. Fouquet, nothing is easier, I perceive, than our coming to an understanding. Your wish is to invite me to your *fête*,—my own is to be present at it; invite me, and I will go."—"Is it possible that your Majesty will deign to accept?" murmured the superintendent.

"Why, really, Monsieur," said the king, laughing, "I think I do more than accept,—I think I invite myself."—"Your Majesty overwhelms me with honour and delight!" exclaimed Fouquet; "but I shall be obliged to repeat what M. de la Vieuville said to your ancestor Henry IV., *Domine, non sum dignus*."—"To which I reply, M. Fouquet, that if you give a *fête*, I will go, whether I am invited or not."

"I thank your Majesty deeply," said Fouquet, as he raised his head beneath this favour, which he was convinced would be his ruin. "But how could your Majesty have been informed of it?"—"By public rumour, M. Fouquet, which says such wonderful things of yourself and of the marvels of your house. Would you become proud, M. Fouquet, if the king were to be jealous of you?"—"I should be the happiest man in the world, Sire, since the very day on which your Majesty were to become jealous of Vaux, I should possess something worthy of being offered to you."—"Very well, M. Fouquet, prepare your *fête*, and open the doors of your house as widely as possible."

"It is for your Majesty to fix the day," said Fouquet.—"This

day month, then."—"Has your Majesty any further commands?"—"Nothing, Monsieur the Superintendent, except from the present moment until then to have you near me as much as possible."—"I have the honour to form one of your Majesty's party for the ride."—"Very good. I am just now starting, M. Fouquet; for there are the ladies, I see, who are going to the appointed place."

With this remark, the king, with all the eagerness, not only of a young man, but of a young man in love, withdrew from the window, in order to take his gloves and cane, which his valet held ready for him. The neighing of the horses and the rumbling of the wheels on the gravel of the courtyard were heard. The king descended the stairs; and at the moment he made his appearance upon the flight of steps, every one stopped. The king walked straight up to the young queen. The queen-mother, who was still suffering more than ever from the illness with which she was afflicted, did not wish to go out. Maria Theresa accompanied Madame in her carriage, and asked the king in what direction he wished to ride. The king, who had just seen La Vallière, still pale from the events of the previous evening, get into a carriage with three of her companions, told the queen that he had no preference, and wherever she would wish to go, he would accompany her. The queen then desired that the outriders should proceed in the direction of Apremont. The outriders set off, accordingly, before the others. The king rode on horseback, and for a few minutes accompanied the carriage of the queen and Madame, with his hand resting upon the door. The weather had cleared up a little; but a kind of veil of dust, like a thick gauze, was still spread over the surface of the heavens, and the sun made every glittering atom of dust glisten again within the circuit of its rays. The heat was stifling; but as the king did not seem to pay any attention to the state of the weather, no one made himself uneasy about it, and the party, in obedience to the orders which had been given by the queen, took its course in the direction of Apremont.

The courtiers present were full of spirits; it was evident that every one tried to forget, and to make others forget, the bitter discussions of the previous evening. Madame, particularly, was delightful; in fact, seeing the king at the door of her carriage, as she did not suppose he would be there for the queen's sake, she hoped that her prince had returned to remain with her. Hardly, however, had they proceeded a quarter of a mile on the road, when the king with a gracious smile saluted them and

drew up his horse, leaving the queen's carriage to pass on, then that of the principal ladies of honour, and then all the others in succession, who, seeing the king stop, wished in their turn to stop too; but the king made a sign to them to continue their progress. When La Vallière's carriage passed, the king approached it, saluted the ladies, and was preparing to accompany the carriage of the maids of honour in the same way he had attended Madame's, when suddenly the whole file of carriages stopped. It appeared that the queen, uneasy because the king had left her, had just given orders for the performance of this manœuvre, the direction in which the promenade was to take place having been left to her. The king, having sent to inquire what her object was in stopping the carriages, was informed in reply that she wished to walk. She very probably hoped that the king, who was attending the carriage of the maids of honour on horseback, would not venture to attend the maids of honour themselves on foot.

They had arrived in the middle of the forest. The promenade, in fact, was not ill-timed, especially for those who were dreamers or lovers. From the little open space where the halt had just been made, three beautiful long walks, shady and undulating, stretched out before them. These walks were green with moss and arched over by foliage; and each one had its horizon, consisting of about a handbreadth of sky, seen through the interlacing of the branches of the trees. At the end of the walks the startled deer were seen hurrying to and fro, with manifest signs of uneasiness; first stopping for a moment in the middle of the path, and raising their heads, they fled with the speed of an arrow, or bounded into the depths of the forest, where they disappeared from view. Now and then a rabbit, of philosophical mien, could be noticed quietly sitting upright, rubbing his muzzle with his fore-paws, and looking about inquiringly, as though wondering whether all these people who were approaching in his direction, and who had just disturbed him in his meditations and his meal, were not followed by some crooked-legged dog, or whether some one of them had not a gun under his arms.

All alighted from their carriages as soon as they observed that the queen was doing so. Maria Theresa took the arm of one of her ladies of honour, and with a side-glance towards the king, who did not perceive that he was in the slightest degree the object of the queen's attention, entered the forest by the first path before her. Two of the outriders preceded her Majesty

with long poles, which they used for the purpose of putting the branches of the trees aside, or removing the brambles which might impede her progress. As soon as Madame alighted she found the Comte de Guiche at her side, who bowed and placed himself at her disposal. Monsieur, delighted with his bath two days before, had announced his preference for the river, and, having given De Guiche leave of absence, had remained at the château with the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp. He was not in the slightest degree jealous. He had been looked for to no purpose in the procession; but as Monsieur was a man who thought a great deal of himself, and usually contributed very little to the general pleasure, his absence had been a subject of satisfaction rather than of regret.

Every one had followed the example which the queen and Madame had set, doing just as they pleased, according as chance or fancy influenced them. The king, we have already observed, remained near La Vallière, and throwing himself off his horse at the moment the door of her carriage was opened, offered her his hand to alight. Montalais and Tonnay-Charente immediately drew back and kept at a distance,—the former from calculated, the latter from prudent, motives. There was this difference however, between the two, that the one had withdrawn from a wish to please the king, the other from the wish to displease him. During the last half-hour the weather also had undergone a change. The clouds which had been spread over the sky, as if driven by a blast of heated air, had become massed together in the west; and afterwards, as if resisted by a contrary wind, were now advancing slowly and heavily towards them. The approach of the storm could be felt; but as the king did not perceive it, no one thought it was right to do so. The promenade was therefore continued. Some of the company, with minds ill at ease on the subject, raised their eyes from time to time towards the sky; others, even more timid, walked about without wandering too far from the carriages, where they expected to take shelter in case the storm burst. The greater part of the procession, however, observing that the king fearlessly entered the wood with La Vallière, followed his Majesty. The king, noticing this, took La Vallière's hand, and led her away by a side-path, where no one ventured to follow him.

CHAPTER CXXXVI

THE SHOWER OF RAIN

At this moment, and in the same direction in which the king and La Vallière were proceeding, except that they were in the wood itself instead of following the path, two men were walking together, utterly indifferent to the appearance of the heavens. Their heads were bent down in the manner of people occupied with matters of great moment. They had not observed either De Guiche and Madame, or the king and La Vallière. Suddenly something passed through the air like a stream of fire, followed by a loud but distant rumbling noise. "Ah!" said one of them, raising his head, "here is the storm. Let us regain our carriages, my dear D'Herblay."

Aramis looked inquiringly at the heavens. "There is no occasion to hurry yet," he said; and then, resuming the conversation where it had doubtless been interrupted, he said, "You were observing that the letter we wrote last evening must by this time have reached its destination?"—"I was saying that she certainly has it."—"By whom did you send it?"—"By my old servant, as I have already told you."—"Did he bring back an answer?"—"I have not seen him since. The young girl was probably in attendance on Madame, or was in her own room dressing, and he may have had to wait. Our time for leaving arrived; and we set off of course. I cannot, therefore, know what is going on yonder."

"Did you see the king before leaving?"—"Yes."—"How did he seem?"—"Nothing could be better or worse, according as he be sincere or hypocritical."—"And the *fête?*"—"Will take place in a month."—"He invited himself, you say?"—"With a pertinacity in which I detected Colbert's influence. But has not last night quite removed your illusions?"—"With respect to what?"

"With respect to the assistance you may be able to give me in this matter."—"No; I have passed the night writing, and all my orders are given."—"Do not conceal from yourself, D'Herblay, that the *fête* will cost several millions."—"I will give six; do you on your side get two or three, at all events."

"You are a wonderful man, my dear D'Herblay." Aramis smiled. "But," inquired Fouquet, with some remaining uneasi-

ness, "how is it that while now you are squandering millions in this manner, a few days ago you did not pay the fifty thousand livres to Baisemeaux out of your own pocket?"—"Because a few days ago I was as poor as Job."—"And to-day?"—"To-day I am wealthier than the king himself."—"Very well," said Fouquet; "I understand men pretty well,—I know you are incapable of falsehood; I do not wish to wrest your secret from you, and so let us talk no more about it."

At this moment a dull, heavy rumbling was heard, which suddenly burst forth in a violent clap of thunder. "Oh!" said Fouquet, "I was quite right in what I said."—"Come," said Aramis, "let us rejoin the carriages."—"We shall not have time," said Fouquet, "for here comes the rain." In fact, as if the heavens were opened, a shower of large drops of rain was suddenly heard falling on the trees about them. "Oh!" said Aramis, "we shall have time to reach the carriages before the foliage becomes saturated."—"It will be better," said Fouquet, "to take shelter somewhere,—in a grotto, for instance."

"Yes, but where are we to find a grotto?" inquired Aramis. —"I know one," said Fouquet, smiling, "not ten paces from here." Then looking round about him, he added, "Yes, we are quite right."—"You are very fortunate to have so good a memory," said Aramis, smiling in his turn; "but are you not afraid that your coachman, finding we do not return, will suppose that we have taken another road back, and that he will follow the carriages belonging to the court?"—"Oh, there is no fear of that!" said Fouquet. "Whenever I place my coachman and my carriage in any particular spot, nothing but an express order from the king could stir them. But it seems that we are not the only ones who have come so far, for I hear footsteps and the sound of voices."

As he spoke, Fouquet turned, and opened with his cane a mass of foliage which hid the path from his view. Aramis's glance as well as his own was directed at the same moment through the opening he had made. "A woman!" said Aramis.—"A man!" said Fouquet.—"La Vallière!"—"The king!"

"Oh!" said Aramis, "is the king aware of your cavern as well? I should not be astonished if he were, for he seems to be on very good terms with the nymphs of Fontainebleau."—"Never mind," said Fouquet; "let us get there. If he is not aware of it, we shall see what he will do; if he should know it, as it has two openings, while he enters by one we can leave by the other."—"Is it far?" asked Aramis; "for the rain is

beginning to penetrate."—"We are there now," said Fouquet, as he put aside a few branches, and an excavation of the rock could be observed, which had been entirely concealed by heaths, ivy, and a thick covert of small shrubs.

Fouquet led the way, followed by Aramis; but as the latter entered the grotto, he turned round, saying, "Yes, they are entering the wood; and see! they are bending their steps this way."—"Very well; let us make room for them," said Fouquet, smiling and pulling Aramis by his cloak.—"But I do not think the king knows of my grotto."—"True," said Aramis; "they are looking about them, but it is only for a tree of denser foliage."

Aramis was not mistaken. The king's looks were directed upwards, and not around him. He held La Vallière's arm within his own, and her hand in his. La Vallière's feet began to slip on the damp grass. Louis again looked round him with greater attention than before, and perceiving an enormous oak with a thick growth of foliage hurriedly drew La Vallière beneath its protecting shelter. The poor girl looked round her on all sides, and seemed half afraid, half desirous, of being followed. The king made her lean her back against the trunk of the tree, whose vast circumference, protected by the thickness of the foliage, was as dry as if at that moment the rain had not been falling in torrents. He himself remained standing before her with his head uncovered. After a few minutes some drops of rain penetrated through the branches of the tree and fell on the king's forehead, but he was not even aware of it. "Oh, Sire!" murmured La Vallière, pushing the king's hat towards him. But the king simply bowed, and determinedly refused to cover his head.

"Now or never is the time to offer your place," said Fouquet in Aramis's ear.—"Now or never is the time to listen, and not lose a syllable of what they may have to say to each other," replied Aramis in Fouquet's ear. In fact they both remained perfectly silent, and the king's voice reached them where they were.

"Believe me, Mademoiselle," said the king, "I perceive, or rather I can imagine, your uneasiness; believe how sincerely I regret to have separated you from the rest of the company, to bring you to a place where you will suffer from the rain. You are wet already, and perhaps are cold too?"—"No, Sire."—"And yet you tremble?"—"I am afraid, Sire, that my absence may be misinterpreted at the moment when all the others are certainly reassembled."—"I would be glad to

propose returning to the carriages, Mademoiselle, but pray look and listen, and tell me if it be possible to attempt to make the slightest progress at the present moment?" In fact, the thunder was still rolling, and the rain continued to fall in torrents. "Besides," continued the king, "no possible interpretation can be made which would be to your discredit. Are you not with the King of France,—in other words, with the first gentleman of the kingdom."

"Certainly, Sire," replied La Vallière, "and it is a very distinguished honour for me; it is not, therefore, for myself that I fear the interpretations that may be made."—"For whom, then?"—"For yourself, Sire."—"For me, Mademoiselle?" said the king, smiling; "I do not understand you."—"Has your Majesty already forgotten what took place yesterday evening in her royal Highness's apartments?"—"Oh! forget that, I beg, or allow me to remember it for no other purpose than to thank you once more for your letter, and—"

"Sire," interrupted La Vallière, "the rain is falling, and your Majesty's head is uncovered."—"I entreat you not to think of anything but yourself, Mademoiselle."—"Oh!" said La Vallière, smiling, "I am a country girl, accustomed to roaming through the meadows of the Loire and the gardens of Blois, whatever the weather may be. And as for my clothes," she added, looking at her simple muslin dress, "your Majesty sees they are not much to risk."—"Indeed, Mademoiselle, I have already noticed more than once that you owed nearly everything to yourself and nothing to your toilet. You are not a coquette, and that is one of your greatest charms in my eyes."

"Sire, do not make me out better than I am, and say merely, 'You cannot be a coquette.'"—"Why so?"—"Because," said La Vallière, smiling, "I am not rich."—"You admit, then," said the king, quickly, "that you have a love for beautiful things."—"Sire, I regard only those things as beautiful which are within my reach. Everything which is too highly placed for me—"—"You are indifferent to?"—"Is foreign to me, as being prohibited."

"And I, Mademoiselle," said the king, "do not find that you are at my court on the footing you should be. The services of your family have not been sufficiently brought under my notice. The advancement of your family has been cruelly neglected by my uncle."—"Oh, not at all, Sire! His royal Highness Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans has always been exceedingly kind to M. de Saint-Remy, my step-father. The services rendered

were humble, and, properly speaking, our services have been adequately recognised. It is not every one who is happy enough to find opportunities of serving his sovereign with distinction. I have no doubt at all that if ever opportunities had been met with, my family's deeds would have been equal to their loyalty; but that happiness has never been ours."—"In that case, Mademoiselle, it belongs to kings to repair the want of opportunity; and most delightedly do I undertake to repair, in your instance, and with the least possible delay, the wrongs of fortune towards you."

"Nay, Sire," cried La Vallière, eagerly; "leave things, I beg, as they now are."—"What, Mademoiselle! you refuse what I ought and what I wish to do for you!"—"All I desired has been granted me, Sire, when the honour was conferred upon me of forming one of Madame's household."—"But if you refuse for yourself, at least accept for your family."—"Your generous intention, Sire, bewilders and makes me apprehensive; for in doing for my family what your kindness urges you to do, your Majesty will raise up enemies for us, and enemies for yourself too. Leave me in my humble condition, Sire; leave to all the emotions I may experience the happy refinement of disinterestedness."—"The sentiments you express," said the king, "are indeed admirable."

"Quite true," murmured Aramis in Fouquet's ear, "and he cannot be accustomed to them."—"But," replied Fouquet, "suppose she were to make a similar reply to my letter."—"True!" said Aramis; "let us not anticipate, but wait the conclusion."—"And then, dear M. d'Herblay," added the superintendent, hardly able to appreciate the sentiments which La Vallière had just expressed, "it is very often a sound calculation to seem disinterested with monarchs."—"Exactly what I was thinking this very minute," said Aramis. "Let us listen."

The king approached nearer to La Vallière; and as the rain dripped more and more through the foliage of the oak, he held his hat over the head of the young girl, who raised her beautiful blue eyes towards the royal hat which sheltered her, and shook her head, sighing deeply as she did so. "What melancholy thought," said the king, "can possibly reach your heart when I place mine as a rampart before it?"—"I will tell you, Sire. I had already once before broached this question, which is so difficult for a young girl of my age to discuss, but your Majesty imposed silence on me. Your Majesty belongs not to yourself

alone, you are married; and every sentiment which would separate your Majesty from the queen, in leading your Majesty to take notice of me, will be a source of the profoundest sorrow for the queen." The king endeavoured to interrupt the young girl, but she continued with a suppliant gesture: "The queen loves your Majesty with an attachment which can be well understood, and follows with her eyes every step of your Majesty which separates you from her. Happy enough in having had her fate united to your own, she weepingly implores Heaven to preserve you to her, and is jealous of the faintest throb of your heart bestowed elsewhere." The king again seemed anxious to speak, but again did La Vallière venture to prevent him. "Would it not, therefore, be a most blamable action," she continued, "if your Majesty, a witness of this anxious and disinterested affection, gave the queen any cause for jealousy? Oh, forgive me, Sire, for the expression I have used! I well know it is impossible, or rather that it would be impossible, that the greatest queen of the whole world could be jealous of a poor girl like myself. But though a queen, she is still a woman; and her heart, like that of any of her sex, cannot close itself against the suspicions which such as are evilly disposed insinuate. For heaven's sake, Sire, think no more of me! I am unworthy of your regard."

"Oh, Mademoiselle," exclaimed the king, "do you not know that in speaking as you have done, you change my esteem for you into admiration?"—"Sire, you take my words for more than they are; you suppose me to be better than I really am, and attach a greater merit to me than God has ever given me. Spare me, Sire; for did I not know your Majesty to be the most generous man in your kingdom, I should believe your Majesty were jesting."—"You do not, I know, fear such a thing; I am quite sure of that," exclaimed Louis.

"Sire, I shall be obliged to believe it, if your Majesty continues to hold such language towards me."—"I am a most unhappy prince, then," said the king, in a tone of regret which was not assumed,—"the unhappiest prince in all Christendom, since I am powerless to induce belief in my words in one whom I love the best in the wide world, and who almost breaks my heart by refusing to credit my regard for her."—"Oh, Sire!" said La Vallière, gently putting the king aside, who had approached nearer and nearer to her, "I think the storm has passed away now, and the rain has ceased."

At the very moment, however, that the poor girl, fleeing as

it were from her own heart, which doubtless throbbed too much in unison with the king's, uttered these words, the storm undertook to contradict her. A bluish flash of lightning illumined the forest with a weird glare, and a peal of thunder, like a discharge of artillery, burst over their very heads, as if the height of the oak which sheltered them had attracted the thunderbolt. The young girl could not repress a cry of terror. The king with one hand drew her towards his heart, and stretched the other above her head, as though to shield her from the lightning. A moment's silence ensued, as the group, delightful as everything young and loving is delightful, remained motionless, while Fouquet and Aramis contemplated it in attitudes as motionless as were those of La Vallière and the king. "Oh, Sire, Sire!" murmured La Vallière, "do you hear?" and her head fell upon his shoulder.—"Yes," said the king. "You see, the storm has not passed away."

"It is a warning, Sire." The king smiled. "Sire, it is the voice of heaven in anger."—"Be it so," said the king. "I agree to accept that peal of thunder as a warning, and even as a menace, if in five minutes from the present moment it is repeated with equal violence; but if not, permit me to think that the storm is a storm simply, and nothing more;" and the king at the same moment raised his head, as if to interrogate the heavens. But as if the heavens had been in agreement with Louis, during the five minutes' silence which elapsed after the burst of thunder which had alarmed the two lovers no renewed peal was heard; and when the thunder was again heard, it was plainly passing away, as if during those same five minutes the storm, put to flight, had traversed the heavens with the speed of the wings of the wind. "Well, Louise," said the king, in a low tone of voice, "will you still threaten me with the anger of heaven? You regarded the thunder as a warning; do you still believe it to be, in the least degree, an omen of misfortune?"

The young girl looked up, and saw that by this time the rain had penetrated the foliage above them, and was trickling down the king's face. "Oh, Sire, Sire!" she exclaimed, in accents of eager apprehension, which greatly agitated the king. "Is it for me," she murmured, "that the king remains thus uncovered and exposed to the rain? What am I, then?"—"You are, you perceive," said the king, "the divinity who dissipates the storm, the goddess who brings back the sun." In fact, a ray of sunlight streamed through the forest, and caused the rain-drops

which dripped from the leaves or fell vertically through the openings in the branches of the trees to glisten like diamonds.

"Sire," said La Vallière, almost overcome, but making a powerful effort over herself,—"Sire, once again think of the trouble your Majesty will have to submit to on my account. At this very moment they are seeking you in every direction. The queen must be full of uneasiness; and Madame—oh, Madame!" the young girl exclaimed, with an expression which almost resembled terror. This name had a certain effect upon the king. He started, and disengaged himself from La Vallière, whom he had till that moment held in his embrace. He then advanced towards the path, in order to look round, and returned somewhat thoughtfully to La Vallière. "Madame, did you say?" he remarked.—"Yes, Madame; she too is jealous," said La Vallière, with a marked accent; and her eyes, so timorous in their expression and so modestly fugitive in their glance, for a moment ventured to question the eyes of the king.

"Still," returned Louis, making an effort over himself, "it seems to me that Madame has no reason, no right, to be jealous of me."—"Alas!" murmured La Vallière.—"Oh, Mademoiselle," said the king, almost in a tone of reproach, "are you among those who think that the sister has a right to be jealous of the brother?"—"It is not for me, Sire, to penetrate your Majesty's secrets."—"You do believe it, then, like the others?" exclaimed the king.—"I do believe Madame is jealous, Sire," La Vallière replied firmly.

"Is it possible," said the king, with some anxiety, "that you have perceived it, then, from her conduct towards you? Have her manners in any way been such towards you that you can attribute them to the jealousy you speak of?"—"Not at all, Sire; I am of so little importance."—"Oh, if it were really the case—" exclaimed Louis, violently.

"Sire," interrupted the young girl, "it has ceased raining; some one is coming, I think;" and forgetful of all etiquette, she seized the king by the arm. "Well," replied the king, "let them come. Who is there who would venture to think I had done wrong in remaining alone with Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"—"For pity's sake, Sire! they will think it strange to see you wet through in this manner, and that you should have run such risk for me."—"I have simply done my duty as a gentleman," said Louis; "and woe to him who may fail in his, in criticising his sovereign's conduct!" In fact, at this moment a few eager and curious persons were seen in the walk, as if

engaged in a search, who, observing the king and La Vallière seemed to have found what they were seeking. They were som of the courtiers who had been sent by the queen and Madame and who immediately uncovered themselves, in token of havin perceived his Majesty. But Louis, notwithstanding La Val lière's confusion, did not quit his respectful and tender attitude Then, when all the courtiers were assembled in the walk,—wher every one had been able to perceive the mark of deference wit which he had treated the young girl, by remaining standing an bareheaded before her during the storm, he offered her his arm led her towards the group who were waiting, recognised by a inclination of the head the respectful salutations which wer paid him on all sides, and still holding his hat in his hand, con ducted her to her carriage. And as the rain still continued t fall,—a last adieu of the departing storm,—the other ladie whom respect had prevented from getting into their carriage before the king, remained, altogether unprotected by hood an cloak, exposed to the rain from which the king, with his ha over her, was protecting, as much as he was able, the humbles among them.

The queen and Madame, like the others, witnessed thi exaggerated courtesy of the king. Madame was so disconcerte at it that she touched the queen with her elbow, saying, "Loo there! look there!" The queen closed her eyes, as if she ha been suddenly seized with a fainting attack. She lifted her han to her face and entered her carriage, Madame following he The king again mounted his horse, and without showing preference for any particular carriage-door, returned to Fon tainebleau, absorbed in thought, the reins hanging on hi horse's neck.

As soon as the crowd had disappeared, and the sound of th horses and carriages grew fainter in the distance, and when the were certain that no one could see them, Aramis and Fouque came out of their grotto, and both of them in silence passe into the walk. Aramis looked most narrowly not only at th whole extent of the open space stretching out before and behin him, but even into the very depths of the wood. "M. Fouquet, he said, when he had quite satisfied himself that they were alone "we must get back, at any cost, the letter you wrote to L Vallière."—"That will be easy enough," said Fouquet, "if m servant has not given it to her."—"In any case it must be done do you understand?"

"Yes; the king is in love with this girl, you mean?"—

"Exceedingly so; and what is worse is that on her side the girl is passionately attached to the king."—"As much as to say that we must change out tactics, I suppose?"—"Not a doubt of it; you have no time to lose. You must see La Vallière, and without thinking any more of becoming her lover, which is out of the question, you must declare yourself her dearest friend and her most humble servant."—"I will do so," replied Fouquet, "and without the slightest feeling of disinclination, for she seems a good-hearted girl."—"Or a clever one," said Aramis; "but in that case the greater reason." Then he added, after a moment's pause, "If I am not mistaken, that girl will become the strongest passion of the king. Let us return to our carriage, and as fast as possible to the château."

CHAPTER CXXXVII

TOBY

Two hours after the superintendent's carriage had set off by Aramis's directions, conveying them both towards Fontainebleau with the fleetness of the clouds which the last breath of the tempest was hurrying across the face of the heavens, La Vallière was closeted in her own apartment, dressed in a simple muslin wrapper, having just finished a slight repast, which was served upon a small marble table. Suddenly the door was opened, and a servant entered to announce M. Fouquet, who had called to request permission to pay his respects to her. She made him repeat the message twice over; for the poor girl only knew M. Fouquet by name, and could not conceive what she could possibly have to do with a superintendent of finances. However, as he might possibly come from the king,—and after the conversation we have recorded, it was very likely,—she glanced at her mirror, drew out still more the long ringlets of her hair, and desired him to be admitted. La Vallière could not, however, refrain from a certain feeling of uneasiness. A visit from the superintendent was not an ordinary event in the life of any woman attached to the court. Fouquet, so notorious for his generosity, his gallantry, and his sensitive delicacy of feeling with regard to women generally, had received more invitations than he had requested audiences. In many houses the presence of the superintendent had been significant of fortune; in many hearts, of love.

Fouquet entered the apartment with a manner full of respect, presenting himself with that ease and gracefulness of manner which was the distinctive characteristic of the men of eminence of that period, and which at the present day seems no longer to be understood, even in the portraits of the period in which the painter has endeavoured to recall them into being. La Vallière acknowledged Fouquet's ceremonious salutation with a timid girl's courtesy, and motioned him to a seat. But Fouquet, with a bow, said, "I will not sit down, Mademoiselle, until you have pardoned me."—"I?" asked La Vallière; "pardoned what?" Fouquet fixed a most piercing look upon the young girl, and fancied he could perceive in her face nothing but the most unaffected surprise. "I observe, Mademoiselle," he said, "that you have as much generosity as intelligence, and I read in your eyes the forgiveness I solicit. A pardon pronounced by your lips is sufficient for me, and I need the forgiveness of your heart and mind."

"Upon my honour, Monsieur," said La Vallière, "I assure you that I do not understand you."—"Again, that is a delicacy on your part which charms me," replied Fouquet, "and I see you do not wish me to blush before you."—"Blush, blush before me? Why should you blush."—"Can I have deceived myself?" said Fouquet; "and can I have been happy enough not to have offended you by my conduct towards you?"

"Really, Monsieur," said La Vallière, shrugging her shoulders, "you speak in enigmas, and I am too ignorant, it seems, to understand you."—"Be it so," said Fouquet; "I will not insist. Tell me only, I entreat you, that I may rely upon your full and complete forgiveness."—"I have but one reply to make to you, Monsieur," said La Vallière, somewhat impatiently, "and I hope that will satisfy you. If I knew the wrong you have done me, I would forgive you, and I do so with still greater reason since I am ignorant of the wrong you allude to." Fouquet bit his lips, as Aramis would have done. "In that case," he said, "I may hope that, notwithstanding what has happened, our good understanding will remain undisturbed, and that you will kindly confer upon me the favour of believing in my respectful friendship."

La Vallière fancied that she now began to understand, and said to herself, "I should not have believed M. Fouquet so eager to seek the source of a favour so very recent;" and then added aloud: "Your friendship, Monsieur! you offer me your friendship! The honour, on the contrary, is mine, and I feel

overpowered by it."—"I am aware, Mademoiselle," replied Fouquet, "that the friendship of the master may appear more brilliant and desirable than that of the servant; but I assure you the latter will be quite as devoted, quite as faithful, and altogether disinterested." La Vallière bowed, for in fact the voice of the superintendent seemed to convey both conviction and real devotion in its tone, and she held out her hand to him, saying, "I believe you."

Fouquet eagerly took the hand that the young girl extended to him. "You see no difficulty, therefore," he added, "in restoring me that unhappy letter?"—"What letter?" inquired La Vallière. Fouquet interrogated her with his most searching gaze, as he had already done before; but the same innocent expression, the same candid look, met his. "I am obliged to confess, Mademoiselle," he said, after this denial, "that your system is the most delicate in the world, and I should not feel that I was a man of honour if I were to suspect anything of a woman so generous as yourself."

"Really, M. Fouquet," replied La Vallière, "it is with profound regret that I am obliged to repeat that I absolutely understand nothing of what you refer to."—"In fact, then, upon your honour, Mademoiselle, you have not received any letter from me?"—"Upon my honour, none," replied La Vallière, firmly.—"Very well, that is quite sufficient; permit me, then, Mademoiselle, to renew the assurance of my utmost esteem and respect," said Fouquet. Then, bowing, he left the room to seek Aramis, who was waiting for him in his own apartment, and leaving La Vallière to ask herself whether the superintendent had not lost his senses.

"Well," inquired Aramis, who was impatiently awaiting Fouquet's return, "are you quite satisfied with the favourite?"—"Enchanted!" replied Fouquet; "she is a woman full of intelligence and fine feeling."—"She did not get angry, then?"—"Far from that, she did not even seem to understand."—"To understand what?"—"To understand that I had written to her."

"She must, however, have understood you sufficiently to give the letter back to you, for I presume she returned it."—"Not at all."—"At least, you satisfied yourself that she had burned it."—"My dear d'Herblay, I have been playing at cross purposes for more than an hour; and however amusing it may be, I begin to have had enough of this game. So understand me thoroughly. The girl pretended not to understand what I

was saying to her; she denied having received any letter; therefore, having positively denied its receipt, she was unable either to return or to burn it."

"Oh!" said Aramis, with uneasiness, "what is that you say?"—"I say that she swore most positively she had not received any letter."—"That is too much. And you did not insist?"—"On the contrary, I did insist, almost impertinently so, even."—"And she persisted in her denial?"—"Unhesitatingly."—"And she did not contradict herself once?"—"Not once."

"But in that case, my friend, you have left our letter in her hands?"—"How could I do otherwise?"—"Oh, it was a great mistake!"—"What the deuce would you have done in my place?"—"One could not force her, certainly; but it is very embarrassing. Such a letter ought not to remain in existence against us."

"Oh, the young girl's disposition is generosity itself; I read her eyes, and I am convinced of it."—"You think she can be relied upon?"—"From my heart I do."—"Well, I think we are mistaken."—"In what way?"—"I think that, in point of fact, as she herself told you, she did not receive the letter."—"What! do you suppose—"—"I suppose that, from some motive, of which we know nothing, your man did not deliver the letter to her."

Fouquet rang the bell. A servant appeared. "Send Toby here," he said. A moment afterwards a man made his appearance, with a restless look, a shrewd expression about the mouth, with short arms, and his back somewhat bent. Aramis fixed a penetrating look upon him "Will you allow me to ask him a few questions myself?" inquired Aramis.—"Do so," said Fouquet.

Aramis was about to say something to the lackey, when he paused. "No," he said; "he would see that we attach too much importance to his answer. Question him yourself; I will pretend to write." Aramis accordingly placed himself at a table, his back turned towards the old attendant, whose every gesture and look he watched in a looking-glass opposite to him. "Come here, Toby!" said Fouquet to the valet, who approached with a tolerably firm step. "How did you execute my commission?" inquired Fouquet.—"In the usual way, Monseigneur," replied the man.

"But how? Tell me."—"I succeeded in penetrating as far as Mademoiselle de la Vallière's apartment; but she was at

Mass, and so I placed the note on her toilet-table. Is not that what you told me to do?"—"Precisely; and is that all?"—"Absolutely all, Monseigneur."—"No one was there."—"No one."—"Did you conceal yourself as I told you?"—"Yes."—"And she returned?"—"Ten minutes afterwards."—"And no one could have taken the letter?"—"No one; for no one had entered the room."—"From the outside; but from the interior?"—"From the place where I was secreted, I could see to the very end of the room."

"Now, listen to me," said Fouquet, looking fixedly at the lackey: "if this letter failed to reach its proper destination, confess it; for if a mistake has been made, your head shall be the forfeit." Toby started, but immediately recovered himself. "Monseigneur," he said, "I put the letter in the very place I told you; and I ask only half an hour to prove to you that the letter is in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hands, or to bring you back the letter itself." Aramis looked at the valet scrutinisingly. Fouquet was naturally disposed to place confidence in people, and for twenty years this man had served him faithfully. "Go," he said; "but bring me the proof you speak of." The lackey quitted the room. "Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Fouquet of Aramis.

"I think that you must, by some means or other, assure yourself of the truth. I think that the letter either has or has not reached La Vallière,—that, in the first case, La Vallière must return it to you, or satisfy you by burning it in your presence; that in the second, you must have the letter back again, even were it to cost you a million. Come, is not that your opinion?"—"Yes! but still, my dear bishop, I believe that you are exaggerating the situation."—"Blind! how blind you are!" murmured Aramis.

"La Vallière," returned Fouquet, "whom we assume to be a politician of the greatest ability, is simply nothing more than a coquette, who hopes that I shall pay my court to her because I have already done so, and who, now that she has received a confirmation of the king's regard, hopes to keep me in leading strings with the letter. It is natural enough!" Aramis shook his head. "Is not that your opinion?" said Fouquet.—"She is not a coquette," he replied.—"Allow me to tell you—"—"Oh, I am well enough acquainted with women who are coquettes!" said Aramis.

"My dear friend!"—"It is a long time since I finished my studies, you mean. But women do not change."—"True;

but men change, and you at the present day are far more suspicious than you formerly were;" and then, beginning to laugh, he added, "Come, if La Vallière is willing to love me only to the extent of a third and the king two thirds, do you think the condition acceptable?" Aramis rose impatiently. "La Vallière," he said, "has never loved, and will never love, any one but the king."

"At all events," said Fouquet, "what would you do?"—"Ask me rather what I would have done."—"Well, what would you have done?"—"In the first place, I should not have allowed that man to go away."—"Toby!"—"Yes; Toby is a traitor. Nay, I am sure of it, and I would not have let him go until he had told me the truth."

"There is still time. I will recall him, and do you question him in your turn."—"Agreed!"—"But I assure you it is quite useless. He has been with me for the last twenty years, and has never occasioned me the slightest embarrassment; and yet," added Fouquet, laughing, "it would have been easy enough."—"Still, call him back! This morning I fancy I saw that man in earnest conversation with one of M. Colbert's men."—"Where was that?"—"Opposite the stables."—"Bah! all my people are at drawn daggers with those of that fellow."—"I saw him, I tell you; and his face, which I did not at first recognise when he entered just now, struck me in a disagreeable manner."

"Why did you not say something, then, while he was here?"—"Because it is only at this very minute that my memory is clear upon the subject."—"Really," said Fouquet, "you alarm me;" and he again rang the bell.—"Provided that it is not already too late," said Aramis. Fouquet once more rang impatiently. The valet usually in attendance appeared. "Toby!" said Fouquet, "send Toby!" The valet again shut the door.

"You leave me at perfect liberty, I suppose?"—"Entirely so."—"I may employ all means, then, to ascertain the truth."—"All."—"Intimidation, even?"—"I constitute you public prosecutor in my place."

They waited ten minutes longer, but in vain; and Fouquet, thoroughly out of patience, again rang loudly. "Toby!" he exclaimed.—"Monseigneur," said the valet, "they are looking for him."—"He cannot be far distant. I have not given him any commission to execute."—"I will go and see, Monseigneur," replied the valet, as he closed the door.

Aramis during this interval walked impatiently but silently

up and down the study. Again they waited another ten minutes. Fouquet rang in a manner to awaken a whole city of the dead. The valet again presented himself, trembling in a way to induce a belief that he was the bearer of bad news. "Monseigneur is mistaken," he said, before even Fouquet could question him; "you must have given Toby some commission, for he has been to the stables and taken your Lordship's swiftest horse, and saddled it himself."—"Well?"—"And he has gone off."

"Gone!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Let him be pursued, let him be captured."—"Nay, nay," said Aramis, taking him by the hand, "be calm; the evil is done now."—"The evil is done, you say?"—"No doubt; I was sure of it. And now let us give no cause for suspicion; we must calculate the result of the blow and ward it off, if possible."—"After all," said Fouquet, "the evil is not great."—"You think so?" said Aramis.

"Of course. Surely a man is allowed to write a love-letter to a woman."—"A man, certainly; a subject, no,—especially when the woman in question is one with whom the king is in love."—"But, my friend, the king was not in love with La Vallière a week ago; he was not in love with her yesterday, and the letter is dated yesterday. I could not guess the king was in love, when the king's affection was not even yet in existence."—"As you please," replied Aramis; "but unfortunately the letter is not dated, and it is that circumstance particularly which annoys me. If it had only been dated yesterday, I should not have the slightest shadow of uneasiness on your account."

Fouquet shrugged his shoulders. "Am I not my own master," he said; "and is the king, then, king of my brain and of my flesh!"—"You are right," replied Aramis; "do not let us give more importance to matters than is necessary; and besides— Well, if we are menaced, we have means of defence."—"Oh, menaced!" said Fouquet, "you do not place this gnat-bite as it were among the number of menaces which may compromise my fortunes and my life, do you?"—"Do not forget, M. Fouquet, that the bite of an insect can kill a giant, if the insect be venomous."

"But has this sovereign power you were speaking of already vanished?"—"I am all-powerful, it is true, but I am not immortal."—"Come, then, the most pressing matter is to find Toby again, I suppose. Is not that your opinion?"—"Oh! as for that, you will not find him again," said Aramis; "and

if he was of any great value to you, you must give him up for lost."—"At all events, he is somewhere in the world," said Fouquet.—"You are right; let me act," replied Aramis.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII

MADAME'S FOUR CHANCES

ANNE OF AUSTRIA had begged the young queen to pay her a visit. For some time past suffering most acutely, and losing both her youth and beauty with that rapidity which marks the decline of women for whom life has been a long contest, Anne of Austria had, in addition to her physical sufferings, to experience the bitterness of being no longer held in any esteem, except as a living remembrance of the past, amid the youthful beauties, wits, and powers of her court. Her physician's opinions, her mirror also, grieved her far less than the inexorable warnings which the society of the courtiers afforded, who, like the rats in a ship, abandon the hold into which the water is on the point of penetrating, owing to the ravages of decay. Anne of Austria did not feel satisfied with the time her eldest son devoted to her. The king, a good son rather from affectation than from affection, had at first been in the habit of passing an hour in the morning and one in the evening with his mother; but since he had himself undertaken the conduct of State affairs, the duration of the morning and evening visits had been reduced to half an hour each; and then, by degrees, the morning visit had been omitted altogether. They met at Mass; the evening visit was replaced by a meeting either at the king's assembly or at Madame's, which the queen attended obligingly enough, out of regard to her two sons. The result was that Madame had acquired an immense influence over the court, which made her apartments the true royal place of meeting. This Anne of Austria had perceived; feeling herself to be suffering, and condemned by her sufferings to frequent solitude, she was distressed at the idea that the greater part of her future days and evenings would pass away solitary, useless, and in dispondency. She recalled with terror the isolation in which Cardinal Richelieu had formerly left her,—those dreaded and insupportable evenings during which, however, she had for consolation youth and beauty, which are always accompanied

by hope. She next formed the project of transporting the court to her own apartments, and of attracting Madame, with her brilliant escort, to her gloomy and already sorrowful abode, where the widow of a king of France and the mother of a king of France was reduced to console, in her anticipated widowhood, the always weeping wife of a king of France.

Anne began to reflect. She had intrigued a good deal in her life. In the good times past, when her youthful mind nursed projects which were invariably successful, she then had by her side, to stimulate her ambition and her love, a friend of her own sex, more eager, more ambitious than herself,—a friend who had loved her (a rare circumstance at court), and whom some petty considerations had removed from her for ever. But for many years past—except Madame de Motteville, and La Molena, her Spanish nurse, a confidante in her character of countrywoman and woman too—who could boast of having given good advice to the queen; or who, among all the youthful heads there, could recall the past for her,—that past in which alone she lived? Anne of Austria remembered Madame de Chevreuse, in the first place exiled rather by her wish than by the king's, and then dying in exile, the wife of a gentleman of obscure birth and position. She asked herself what Madame de Chevreuse would formerly have advised her in a similar circumstance, in the mutual difficulties arising from their intrigues; and after serious reflection it seemed as if her clever, subtle friend, full of experience and sound judgment, answered her in her ironical tone: "All these insignificant young people are poor and greedy of gain. They require gold and incomes to support their pleasures; it is by interest you must gain them over." Anne of Austria adopted this plan. Her purse was well filled, and she had at her disposal a considerable sum of money, which had been amassed by Mazarin for her, and lodged in a place of safety. She possessed the most magnificent jewels in France, among which, and especially worthy of mention, were pearls so large that they made the king sigh every time he saw them, because the pearls of his crown were like millet-seed compared to them.

Anne of Austria no longer had beauty or charms at her disposal. She gave out, therefore, that her wealth was great; and as an inducement for others to visit her apartments, she let it be known that there were good gold crowns to be won at play, or that handsome presents were likely to be given on days when all went well with her, or annuities which she had wrung from the king by entreaty in order to maintain her credit. And in

the first place she tried these means upon Madame, because to gain her consent was of more importance than anything else. Madame, notwithstanding the bold confidence with which her youth and her talents inspired her, blindly ran head-foremost into the net which had been stretched out before her. Enriched by degrees by these presents and transfers of property, she took a fancy to these inheritances by anticipation. Anne of Austria adopted the same means towards Monsieur, and even towards the king himself. She instituted lotteries in her apartments.

The day on which the present chapter opens, invitations had been issued for a late supper in the queen-mother's apartments, as she intended that two beautiful diamond bracelets of exquisite workmanship should be put up for lottery. The medallions were antique cameos of the greatest value; the diamonds, in point of intrinsic value, did not represent a very considerable amount, but the originality and rarity of the workmanship were such that every one at court not only wished to possess the bracelets, but even to see them on the arms of the queen herself; and on the days when she wore them, it was considered a favour to be allowed to admire them in kissing her hands. The courtiers had, even with regard to this subject, adopted various expressions of gallantry to establish the aphorism that the bracelets would have been priceless in value if they had not been unfortunate enough to be placed in contact with arms as beautiful as the queen's. This compliment had been honoured by a translation into all the languages of Europe, and numerous were the verses in Latin and French which had been circulated on the subject.

The day when Anne of Austria determined upon a lottery was in a critical period. The king had not been near his mother for two days. Madame, after the great scene of the dryads and naiads, was sulking by herself. The king's fit of sulkiness was over, but an all-absorbing occupation of mind raised him above the stormy disputes and the giddy pleasures of the court. Anne of Austria effected a diversion by the announcement of the famous lottery to take place in her apartments on the following evening. With this object in view, she saw the young queen, whom, as we already know, she had invited to pay her a visit in the morning. "My daughter," she said to her, "I have good news to tell you; the king has been saying the most tender things to me about you. He is young, you know, and easily drawn away; but so long as you keep near me, he will not venture to keep away from you,—to whom, besides, he is most

warmly and affectionately attached. I intend to have a lottery this evening, and shall expect to see you."

"I have heard," said the young queen, with a sort of timid reproach, "that your Majesty intends to put in lottery those beautiful bracelets whose rarity is so great that we ought not to allow them to pass out of the custody of the crown, even were there no other reason than that they had once belonged to you."—"My daughter," said Anne of Austria, who read the young queen's thoughts, and wished to console her for not having received the bracelets as a present, "it is necessary that I should attract Madame always to my apartments."—"Madame!" said the young queen, blushing.

"Of course; would you not prefer to have a rival near you, whom you could watch and rule over, than to know that the king is with her, always as ready to flirt with her as she with him. The lottery I have proposed is my means of attraction for that purpose; do you blame me?"—"Oh, no!" returned Maria Theresa, clapping her hands with a childlike expression of delight. "And you no longer regret, then, my dear, that I did not give you these bracelets, as I had at first intended to do?"—"Oh, no, no, my kind mother!"—"Very well, my dear daughter; make yourself look as beautiful as possible, that our supper may be very brilliant; the gayer you seem, the more charming you appear, and you will eclipse all the ladies present as much by your brilliancy as by your rank."

Maria Theresa left full of delight. An hour afterwards, Anne of Austria received a visit from Madame, whom she covered with caresses, saying, "Excellent news! the king is charmed with my lottery."—"But I," replied Madame, "am not quite so charmed; to see such beautiful bracelets on any one's arms but yours or mine is what I cannot reconcile myself to."—"Well, well," said Anne of Austria, concealing by a smile a violent pain which she had just experienced, "do not alarm yourself, young lady, and do not look at things in the worst light immediately."—"Ah, Madame, Fortune is blind, and I am told there are two hundred tickets."—"Quite as many as that; but you cannot surely forget that there can be only one winner."—"No doubt. But who will that be? Can you tell?" said Madame, in despair.

"You remind me that I had a dream last night; my dreams are always good,—I sleep so little."—"What was your dream?—But are you suffering?"—"No," said the queen, stifling with wonderful command the torture of a renewed attack of shooting

pains in her bosom; "I dreamed that the king won the bracelets."—"The king?"—"You are going to ask me, I think, what the king could possibly do with the bracelets?"—"Yes."—"And you would not add, perhaps, that it would be very fortunate if the king were really to win, for he would be obliged to give the bracelets to some one else."—"To restore them to you, for instance."—"In which case I should immediately give them away; for you do not think," said the queen, laughing, "that I have put these bracelets up for lottery from necessity. My object was to give them without arousing any one's jealousy; but if Fortune should not get me out of my difficulty—well, I would teach Fortune a lesson, and I know very well to whom I would offer the bracelets." These words were accompanied by so expressive a smile that Madame could not resist paying her by a grateful kiss.

"But," added Anne of Austria, "do you not know as well as I do, that if the king were to win the bracelets, he would not restore them to me?"—"You mean he would give them to the queen?"—"No, and for the very same reason that he would not give them back again to me; since, if I had wished to make the queen a present of them, I had no need of him for that purpose."

Madame cast a side-glance upon the bracelets, which in their casket were dazzlingly exposed to view upon a table close beside her. "How beautiful they are!" she said, sighing. "But stay!" Madame continued; "we are quite forgetting that your Majesty's dream is nothing but a dream."—"I should be very much surprised," returned Anne of Austria, "if my dream were to deceive me; that has happened to me very seldom."—"We may look upon you as a prophetess, then."

"I have already said, my daughter, that I dream but very rarely; but the coincidence of my dream about this matter with my own ideas is extraordinary,—it agrees so wonderfully with my own views and arrangements."—"What arrangements do you allude to?"—"That you will win the bracelets, for instance."—"In that case it will not be the king."

"Oh," said Anne of Austria, "there is not such a very great distance between his Majesty's heart and your own; for are you not his beloved sister? There is not, I repeat, so very wide a distance that my dream can be pronounced false. Come, let us reckon up the chances in your favour."—"I will count them."—"In the first place, we will begin with the dream. If the king wins, he is sure to give you the bracelets."—"I admit that is

one."—"If you win them, they are yours."—"Naturally! that may be admitted also."—"Lastly,—if Monsieur were to win them!"—"Oh!" said Madame, laughing heartily, "he would give them to the Chevalier de Lorraine."

Anne of Austria laughed as heartily as her daughter-in-law; so freely, indeed, that her sufferings again returned, and made her turn suddenly pale at the very height of her mirth. "What is the matter?" inquired Madame, alarmed.—"Nothing, nothing,—a pain in my side. I have been laughing too much. We were at the fourth chance, I think."—"Oh, that I cannot see!"—"I beg your pardon. I am not excluded from the chance of winning; and if I be the winner, you are sure of me."—"Oh, thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Madame.

"I hope you look upon yourself as one whose chances are good, and that my dream now begins to assume the solid form of reality."—"Yes, indeed, you give me both hope and confidence," said Madame; "and the bracelets won in this manner will be a hundred times more precious to me."—"Well, then, good-bye until this evening;" and the princesses separated.

Anne of Austria, after her daughter-in-law had left her, said to herself, as she examined the bracelets, "They are indeed precious, since by their means this evening I shall have won over a heart to my side, and at the same time shall have penetrated a secret." Then, turning towards the deserted alcove in her room, she said, addressing vacancy, "Is it not thus that you would have acted, my poor Chevreuse? Yes, yes; I know it is." And, like a perfume of days gone by, her youth, her playful imagination, and her happiness seemed to return to her with the echo of this invocation.

CHAPTER CXXXIX

THE LOTTERY

At eight o'clock in the evening, every one had assembled in the queen-mother's apartments. Anne of Austria, in full dress, beautiful still, with the remains of her former loveliness, and aided by all the resources which coquetry can command at the hands of clever assistants, concealed, or rather pretended to conceal, from the crowd of young courtiers who surrounded her, and who still admired her,—thanks to the combination of circumstances which we have indicated in the preceding chapter,—

the ravages, which were already visible, of the acute suffering to which she finally succumbed a few years later. Madame, almost as great a coquette as Anne of Austria, and the queen, simple and natural as usual, were seated beside her, each contending for her good graces. The ladies of honour, united in a body in order to resist with greater effect and consequently with more success the witty and lively conversations which the young men held with them, were enabled, like a battalion formed in square, to offer one another mutual aid in attack and defence. Montalais, skilled in that skirmishing warfare, protected the whole line by the rolling fire which she directed against the enemy. De Saint-Aignan, in utter despair at the rigour of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, which became insolent in its obstinacy, tried to turn his back upon her; but overcome by the irresistible brilliancy of the beauty's great eyes, he every moment returned to confirm his defeat by new submissions, to which Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not fail to reply by fresh acts of impertinence. De Saint-Aignan did not know to what patron saint to appeal. La Vallière had about her not exactly a court, but a small nucleus of courtiers. De Saint-Aignan, hoping by this manœuvre to attract Athenaïs's attention towards him, had approached the young girl, and saluted her with a respect which induced some slow-going persons to believe that he wished to console himself for Athenaïs by Louise. These, however, were persons who had neither been witnesses of the scene during the shower, nor had heard it spoken of. But as the majority were already informed, and well informed too on the matter, the acknowledged favour with which she was regarded had attracted to her side some of the most astute as well as the least sensible members of the court,—the former, because they said with Montaigne, "What do I know?" and the latter, because they said with Rabelais, "It is likely." The greatest number had followed in the wake of the latter, just as in hunting five or six of the best hounds alone follow the scent of the animal hunted, while the remainder of the pack follow only the scent of the hounds.

The two princesses and the queen examined with particular attention the toilets of their ladies and maids of honour as well as those of the other women; and they condescended to forget that they were queens in recollecting that they were women. In other words, they pitilessly tore in pieces every petticoat-wearer there, as Molière would have said. The looks of both princesses simultaneously fell upon La Vallière, who, as we have

just said, was completely surrounded at that moment. Madame knew not what pity was, and said to the queen-mother, bending towards her, "Indeed, if Fortune were just, she would favour that poor little La Vallière."—"That is not possible," said the queen-mother, smiling.

"Why not?"—"There are only two hundred tickets, so that it was not possible to inscribe every one's name on the list."—"And hers is not there, then?"—"No!"—"What a pity! She might have won them, and then sold them."

"Sold them!" exclaimed the queen.—"Yes; it would have been a dowry for her, and she would not have been obliged to marry without her trousseau, as will probably be the case."—"Really?" answered the queen-mother. "Poor little thing! has she no dresses, then?" and she pronounced these words like a woman who has never been able to understand the inconveniences of a slenderly filled purse.

"Stay, look at her! Heaven forgive me, if she is not wearing the very same skirt this evening that she had on this morning during the drive, and which she managed to keep clean, thanks to the care the king took of her in sheltering her from the rain." At the very moment Madame uttered these words the king entered the room. The two princesses would not perhaps have observed his arrival, so completely were they occupied in their ill-natured remarks, had not Madame noticed that all at once La Vallière, who was standing up facing the gallery, exhibited certain signs of confusion, and then said a few words to the courtiers who surrounded her, who immediately dispersed. This movement induced Madame to look towards the door, and at that moment the captain of the guards announced the king. At this announcement La Vallière, who had hitherto kept her eyes fixed upon the gallery, suddenly cast them down as the king entered. His Majesty was dressed magnificently and in the most perfect taste; he was conversing with Monsieur and the Duc de Roquelaure,—Monsieur on his right and the Duc de Roquelaure on his left. The king advanced in the first place towards the queens, to whom he bowed with an air of graceful respect. He took his mother's hand and kissed it, addressed a few compliments to Madame upon the elegance of her toilet, and then began to make the round of the assembly. La Vallière was saluted in the same manner as the others, with neither more nor less attention. His Majesty then returned to his mother and his wife. When the courtiers noticed that the king had only addressed some ordinary remark to the young girl

who had been so particularly noticed in the morning, they immediately drew their own conclusion to account for this coldness of manner,—this conclusion being that although the king might have taken a sudden fancy to her, that fancy had already disappeared. One thing, however, might have been remarked, —that close beside La Vallière, among the number of the courtiers, M. Fouquet was to be seen; and his respectfully attentive manner served to sustain the young girl in the midst of the varied emotions which visibly agitated her.

M. Fouquet was just on the point, moreover, of speaking in a more friendly manner with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, when M. Colbert approached, and after having bowed to Fouquet with all the formality which the rules of the most respectful politeness could require, seemed determined to take his position beside La Vallière for the purpose of entering into conversation with her. Fouquet immediately yielded his place. This proceeding was eagerly taken in by the eyes of Montalais and Malicorne, who mutually exchanged their several observations on the subject. De Guiche, standing within the embrasure of a window, saw no one but Madame. But as Madame, on her side, frequently glanced at La Vallière, De Guiche's eyes following Madame's were from time to time cast upon the young girl. La Vallière instinctively felt herself sinking beneath the weight of all the different looks, inspired, some by interest, others by envy. She had nothing to compensate her for her sufferings,—not a kind word from her companions, nor a look of affection from the king. The misery the poor girl was suffering was unspeakable.

The queen-mother now directed the small table to be brought forward, on which the lottery tickets were placed, two hundred in number, and begged Madame de Motteville to read the list of the chosen. It was a matter of course that this list had been drawn up in strict accordance with the laws of etiquette; the king's name was first on the list, next that of the queen-mother, the queen, Monsieur, Madame, and so on. All hearts throbbed anxiously as the list was read aloud; more than three hundred persons had been invited, and each of them was anxious to learn whether his or her name was likely to be found among the number of privileged names. The king listened with as much attention as the others; and when the last name had been pronounced, he saw that La Vallière had been omitted from the list. Every one, of course, could remark this omission. The king flushed as if he had been much annoyed; but La Vallière, gentle and resigned as usual, gave no sign of having noticed it.

While the list was being read, the king had not taken his eyes off the young girl, who seemed to expand, as it were, beneath the happy influence which she felt was shed around her, and who was too delighted and too pure in spirit for any other thought than that of love to find an entrance either to her mind or to her heart. Acknowledging this touching self-denial by the fixedness of his attention, the king showed La Vallière that he appreciated its delicacy. When the list was finished, the faces of the different ladies who had been omitted or forgotten fully expressed their disappointment. Malicorne also was forgotten among the number of men; and the grimace he made plainly said to Montalais, who was also forgotten, "Cannot we contrive to arrange matters with Fortune in such a manner that she shall not forget us?" to which a smile full of intelligence from Mademoiselle Aure, replied, "Certainly we can."

The tickets were distributed to each person according to his or her number. The king received his first, next the queen-mother, then Monsieur, then the queen and Madame, and so on. After this, Anne of Austria opened a small Spanish leather bag, containing two hundred numbers engraved upon small balls of mother-of-pearl, and presented the open sack to the youngest of her maids of honour, that she might take one of the balls out of it. The eager expectation, amid all these tediously slow preparations, was rather that of avidity than of curiosity. De Saint-Aignan bent towards Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente to whisper to her, "Since we have each a number, Mademoiselle, let us unite our two chances. The bracelet shall be yours if I win; and if you are successful, deign to give me but one look of your beautiful eyes."—"No," said Athenaïs; "if you win the bracelet, keep it,—every one for himself."

"You are without any pity," said De Saint-Aignan, "and I will punish you by a quatrain,—

> 'Beautiful Iris, to my vows
> You are too opposed—'"

"Silence!" said Athenaïs, "you will prevent me from hearing the winning number."

"Number one," said the young girl who had drawn the mother-of-pearl ball from the Spanish leather bag. "The king!" exclaimed the queen-mother.—"The king has won!" repeated the queen, delightedly.—"Oh! the king! your dream!" said Madame, joyously, in the ear of Anne of Austria.

The king was the only one who did not exhibit any satisfaction.

He merely thanked Fortune for what she had done for him, by addressing a slight reverence to the young girl who had been chosen as the proxy of the swift-winged goddess. Then, receiving from the hands of Anne of Austria, amid the envious murmurs of the whole assembly, the casket enclosing the bracelets, he said, "Are these bracelets really beautiful, then?"—"Look at them," said Anne of Austria, "and judge for yourself." The king looked at them, and said, "Yes, indeed, an admirable medallion. What perfect finish!"

"What perfect finish!" repeated Madame. Queen Maria Theresa easily saw, and that too at the very first glance, that the king would not offer the bracelets to her; but as he did not seem in the least degree disposed to offer them to Madame, she felt satisfied, or nearly so. The king sat down. The most intimate among the courtiers approached, one by one, to admire more closely the beautiful piece of workmanship, which soon with the king's permission was passed about from hand to hand. Soon every one, connoisseur or not, was uttering various exclamations of surprise, and overwhelming the king with congratulations. There was, in fact, something for every one to admire,—the brilliants for some, and the cutting for others. The ladies visibly displayed their impatience at seeing such a treasure monopolised by the gentlemen. "Messieurs, Messieurs," said the king, whom nothing escaped, "one would almost think that you wore bracelets as the Sabines used to do; hand them over to the ladies for a little while, who seem to me to have a just claim to understand such matters better than you."

These words appeared to Madame the beginning of a decision which she expected. She gathered, besides, this happy belief from the glances of the queen-mother. The courtier who held them at the moment when the king made this remark, amid the general excitement hastened to place the bracelets in the hands of Queen Maria Theresa, who, knowing too well, poor woman, that they were not designed for her, hardly looked at them, and almost immediately passed them on to Madame. The latter—and Monsieur even more minutely than herself—gave the bracelets a long look of covetous desire. Then she handed the jewels to those ladies who were near her, pronouncing this single word, but with an accent which expressed as much as a long phrase, "Magnificent!"

The ladies who had received the bracelets from Madame's hands took as much time as they pleased to examine them, and

then made them circulate by passing them on towards the right. During this time the king was tranquilly conversing with De Guiche and Fouquet,—or rather he let them talk, while he did not listen. Accustomed to the set form of ordinary phrases, his ear, like that of all men who exercise an incontestable superiority over others, merely selected from the conversations held about him the indispensable word which requires reply. His attention, however, was now elsewhere, for it wandered as his eyes did. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was the last of the ladies inscribed for tickets; and as if she had ranked according to her name upon the list, she had only Montalais and La Vallière after her. When the bracelets reached these two persons, no one appeared to take any further notice of them. The humble hands which for a moment touched these jewels deprived them of all their importance,—a circumstance which did not, however, prevent Montalais from starting with joy, envy, and covetous desire at the sight of the beautiful stones still more than at their magnificent workmanship. It is evident that if she were compelled to decide between pecuniary value and artistic beauty, Montalais would unhesitatingly have preferred the diamonds to the cameos; and her disinclination, therefore, to pass them to her companion, La Vallière, was very great. La Vallière fixed a look almost of indifference upon the jewels. "Oh, how rich, how magnificent these bracelets are!" exclaimed Montalais; "and yet you do not go into ecstasies about them, Louise! You are no true woman, I am sure."—"Yes, I am indeed," replied the young girl, with an accent of the most charming melancholy; "but why desire that which cannot be ours?"

The king, his head bent forward, listened to what the young girl was saying. Hardly had the vibration of her voice reached his ear than he rose radiant with delight, and passing across the whole circle, from the place where he stood, to La Vallière, "You are mistaken, Mademoiselle," he said; "you are a woman, and every woman has a right to wear jewels, which are made for woman."—"Oh, Sire!" said La Vallière, "will not your Majesty believe absolutely in my modesty?"—"I believe you possess every virtue, Mademoiselle,—frankness as well as every other; I entreat you, therefore, to say frankly what you think of these bracelets."—"I think that they are beautiful, Sire, and cannot be offered to any other than a queen."—"I am delighted that such is your opinion, Mademoiselle; the bracelets are yours, and the king begs you to accept them."

And as with a movement almost resembling terror La Vallière eagerly held out the casket to the king, the king gently pushed back La Vallière's trembling hand. A silence of astonishment more profound than that of death reigned in the assembly; and yet, from the side where the queens were, no one had heard what he had said, nor understood what he had done. A charitable friend, however, took upon herself to spread the news; it was Tonnay-Charente, to whom Madame had made a sign to approach. "Good heavens!" exclaimed Tonnay-Charente, "how happy that La Vallière is! The king has just given her the bracelets."

Madame bit her lips to such a degree that the blood appeared upon the surface of the skin. The young queen looked first at La Vallière and then at Madame, and began to laugh. Anne of Austria rested her chin upon her beautiful white hand, and remained for a long time absorbed by a suspicion which disturbed her mind and a cruel pain which gnawed her heart. De Guiche, observing Madame turn pale, and guessing the cause of her change of colour, abruptly left the assembly and disappeared. Malicorne was then able to approach Montalais very quietly, and under cover of the general din of conversation, said to her, "Aure, you have our fortune and our future close beside you."—"Yes," was her reply, as she tenderly embraced La Vallière, whom inwardly she was tempted to strangle.

CHAPTER CXL

MALAGA

During this long and violent contention between the ambitions of the court and the affections of the heart, one of our characters, the least deserving of neglect perhaps, was however very much neglected, very much forgotten, and exceedingly unhappy. In fact, D'Artagnan—D'Artagnan, we say, for we must call him by his name, to remind our readers of his existence—had absolutely nothing whatever to do amid this brilliant, light-hearted world of fashion. After having followed the king during two whole days at Fontainebleau, and having critically observed all the pastoral fancies and heroicomic travesties of his sovereign, the musketeer felt that he needed something more than this to satisfy the cravings of his existence. At every moment assailed by persons who asked him, "How do you think this costume suits me, M. d'Artagnan?" he would reply to them

in bland, sarcastic tones, "Why, I think you are quite as well dressed as the finest monkey to be found in the fair at St. Laurent." It was just such a compliment as D'Artagnan usually paid where he did not feel disposed to pay any other; and whether agreeable or not, the inquirer was obliged to be satisfied with it. And whenever any one asked him, "M. d'Artagnan, how do you intend to dress yourself this evening?" he replied, "I shall undress myself," at which all the ladies laughed. But after a couple of days passed in this manner, the musketeer, perceiving that nothing serious was likely to arise which could concern him, and that the king had completely—or at least appeared to have completely—forgotten Paris, St. Mandé, and Belle-Isle; that M. Colbert's mind was occupied with illuminations and fireworks; that for the next month, at least, the ladies had glances to bestow and receive,—asked the king for leave of absence for a matter of private business. At the moment D'Artagnan made his request, his Majesty was on the point of going to bed, quite exhausted from dancing.

"You wish to leave me, M. d'Artagnan?" inquired the king, with an air of astonishment; for Louis XIV. could never understand that any one who might have the distinguished honour of being near him could wish to be separated from him. "Sire," said D'Artagnan, "I leave you simply because I am not of the slightest service to you in anything. Ah, if I could only hold the balancing-pole while you were dancing, it would be a very different matter."—"But, my dear M. d'Artagnan," said the king, gravely, "people dance without a balancing-pole."—"Ah, indeed!" said the musketeer, maintaining his imperceptible tone of irony, "I had no idea at all of that."

"You have not seen me dance, then?" inquired the king.—"Yes; but I believed it would give place to matters requiring greater force. I was mistaken,—a greater reason, therefore, why I should withdraw. Sire, I repeat, you have no present occasion for my services; besides, if your Majesty should have any need of me, you would know where to find me."—"Very well," said the king; and he granted him his leave of absence.

We shall not look for D'Artagnan, therefore, at Fontainebleau, for this would be quite useless; but with the permission of our readers we shall find him in the Rue des Lombards, at the sign of the Pilon d'Or, in the house of our old friend Planchet. It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and the weather was exceedingly warm; there was only one window open, and that one belonging to a room on the *entresol*. A perfume of spices,

mingled with another perfume less exotic but more penetrating, —namely, that which arose from the street,—ascended to the nostrils of the musketeer. D'Artagnan, reclining upon an immense flat-backed chair, with his legs not stretched out, but simply placed upon a stool, formed the most obtuse angle that was ever seen. Both his arms were crossed over his head, his head reclining upon his left shoulder, in the manner of Alexander the Great. His eyes, usually so quick and intelligent in their expression, were now half closed, and were fixed upon a small corner of blue sky which was visible behind the opening of the chimneys; there was just enough blue to use if it were necessary to set a piece into one of the sacks of lentils, or beans, which formed the principal furniture of the shop on the ground floor. Thus extended at his ease, and thus sheltered in his place of observation behind the window, D'Artagnan seemed no longer a soldier, no longer an officer of the palace, but a citizen in a state of stagnation between his dinner and supper, or between his supper and his bed,—with one of those strong, ossified brains, which have no more room for a single idea, so fiercely does animal matter keep watch at the doors of intelligence, narrowly inspecting the contraband trade which might result from the introduction into the brain of a symptom of thought.

We have already said that night was closing in; the shops were being lighted, while the windows of the upper apartments were being closed, and the irregular steps of a patrol of soldiers forming the night-watch could be heard in the distance. D'Artagnan continued to think of nothing, and to look at nothing except the blue corner of the sky. A few paces from him, completely in the shade, lying on his stomach upon a sack of Indian corn, was Planchet, with both his arms under his chin, and his eyes fixed on D'Artagnan, who was either thinking, dreaming, or sleeping with his eyes open. Planchet had been watching him for a tolerably long time, and by way of interruption, began by exclaiming, "Hum! hum!" But D'Artagnan did not stir. Planchet then saw that it was necessary to have recourse to some more effectual means. After mature deliberation, the most ingenious means which suggested itself to him in the present circumstances was to let himself roll off the sack to the floor, murmuring at the same time against himself the word "Stupid." But whatever was the noise produced by Planchet's fall, D'Artagnan, who had in the course of his existence heard many other noises, did not appear to pay the least attention to it. Besides, an enormous cart laden with stones, passing from

the Rue St. Médéric, overcame by the noise of its wheels the noise of Planchet's fall. And yet Planchet fancied that, in token of tacit approval, he saw the musketeer imperceptibly smile at the word "Stupid." This emboldened him to say, "Are you asleep. M. d'Artagnan?"—"No, Planchet, I am not even asleep," replied the musketeer.

"I am in despair," said Planchet, "to hear such a word as *even*."—"Well, and why not? Is it not a good word, M. Planchet?"—"Of course, M. d'Artagnan."—"Well?"—"Well, then, the word distresses me beyond measure."—"Tell me why you are distressed, Planchet," said D'Artagnan.

"If you say that you are not *even* asleep, it is as much as to say that you have not even the consolation of being able to sleep; or better still, it is precisely the same as telling me that you are bored to death."—"Planchet, you know I am never bored."—"Except to-day and the day before yesterday."—"Bah!"—"M. d'Artagnan, it is a week since you returned from Fontainebleau; it is a week since you had any orders to issue, or your men to review and manœuvre. You need the sound of guns, drums, and all that royal din and confusion; I, who have myself carried a musket, can easily believe that."

"Planchet," replied D'Artagnan, "I assure you that I am not bored the least in the world."—"In that case what are you doing, lying there as if you were dead?"—"My dear Planchet, there was once upon a time, at the siege of La Rochelle, when I was there, when you were there, when we both were there, a certain Arab, who was celebrated for his skill in aiming culverins. He was a clever fellow, although very singular with regard to his complexion, which was of the same colour as your olives. Well, this Arab, whenever he had done eating or working, used to sit down to rest himself, as I am resting now, and smoked I cannot tell you what sort of magical leaves through a long amber-mouthed tube; and if any officer happening to pass reproached him for being always asleep, he used quietly to reply, 'Better to sit down than to stand up, to lie down than to sit down, to be dead than to lie down.'"

"He was a very melancholy Arab, both from his colour and from his style of conversation," said Planchet. "I remember him perfectly well. He used to cut off the heads of the Protestants with extreme satisfaction."—"Precisely; and then used to embalm them, when they were worth the trouble."—"Yes; and when he was engaged in his embalming occupations, with his herbs and other plants about him, he looked like a basket-

maker making baskets."—"You are quite right, Planchet; he did so."

"Oh, I can remember things too."—"I have no doubt of it; but what do you think of his mode of reasoning?"—"I think it very good in one sense, Monsieur, but very stupid in another."—"Explain, Planchet, explain."—"Well, Monsieur, in point of fact, then, 'Better to sit down than to stand up,' is plain enough, especially when one may be fatigued under certain circumstances;" and Planchet smiled in a roguish way. "As for 'Better to be lying down than sitting down,' let that pass; but as for the last proposition, that it is 'better to be dead than lying down,' it is, in my opinion, very absurd, my own undoubted preference being for my bed; and if you are not of my opinion, it is simply, as I have already had the honour of telling you, because you are boring yourself to death."

"Planchet, do you know M. La Fontaine?"—"The chemist at the corner of the Rue St. Médéric?"—"No; the writer of fables?"—"Oh! Maître Corbeau!"—"Exactly so; well, then, I am like his hare."—"He has a hare also, then?"—"He has all sorts of animals."—"Well, what does his hare do, then?"—"His hare thinks."—"Ah, ah!"—"Planchet, I am like M. La Fontaine's hare,—I am thinking."

"You're thinking, you say?" said Planchet, uneasily.—"Yes; your house is dull enough to drive people to think. You will admit that, I hope."—"And yet, Monsieur, you have a look-out upon the street."—"Yes; and wonderfully interesting that is, of course."—"But it is no less true, Monsieur, that if you were living at the back of the house you would be bored—I mean you would think—more than ever."—"Upon my word, Planchet, I hardly know that."

"Still," said the grocer, "if your reflections were at all like those which led you to restore King Charles II.;" and Planchet finished by a little laugh which was not without its meaning.—"Ah, Planchet, my friend," returned D'Artagnan, "you are getting ambitious."—"Is there no other king to be restored, M. d'Artagnan,—no other Monk to be put into a box?"—"No, my dear Planchet; all the kings are seated on their thrones,—less comfortably so, perhaps, than I am upon this chair; but, at all events, there they are;" and D'Artagnan sighed.

"M. d'Artagnan," said Planchet, "you are making me very uneasy."—"You're very good, Planchet."—"I have a suspicion, Heaven forgive me!"—"What is it?"—"M. d'Artagnan, you are getting thin."

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, striking his chest, which sounded like an empty cuirass, "it is impossible, Planchet."—"Ah!" said Planchet, with effusion, "if you were to get thin in my house—"—"Well?"—"I should do something rash."—"What would you do? Tell me."—"I should look out for the man who was the cause of all your anxieties."—"Ah! according to your account, I am anxious now."—"Yes, you are anxious, and you are getting thin, visibly getting thin. *Malaga!* if you go on getting thin in this way, I will take my sword in my hand, and go straight to M. d'Herblay and have it out with him."

"What!" said M. d'Artagnan, starting in his chair,—"what's that you say, Planchet? And what has M. d'Herblay's name to do with your groceries?"—"Just as you please. Get angry if you like, or call me names if you like, but, *morbleu!* I know what I know."

D'Artagnan had, during this second outburst of Planchet, so placed himself as not to lose a single look of his face; that is, he sat with both his hands resting on his knees, and his head stretched towards the worthy grocer. "Come, explain yourself," he said, "and tell me how you could possibly utter such a blasphemy. M. d'Herblay, your old master, my friend, an ecclesiastic, a musketeer turned bishop,—would you raise your sword against him, Planchet?"—"I could raise my sword against my own father when I see you in such a state as you are now."—"M. d'Herblay, a gentleman!"—"It's all the same to me whether he's a gentleman or not. He gives you the blue devils, that is all I know; and the blue devils make people get thin. *Malaga!* I have no notion of M. d'Artagnan leaving my house thinner than he entered it."

"How does he give me the blue devils, as you call it? Come, explain, explain!"—"You have had the nightmare during the last three nights."—"I?"—"Yes, you; and in your nightmare you called out, several times, 'Aramis! sly Aramis!'"—"Ah! I said that, did I?" murmured D'Artagnan, uneasily.

"Yes, those very words, upon my honour."—"Well, what else? You know the saying, my friend, 'Dreams go by contraries.'"—"Not so; for every time during the last three days when you went out, you have not once failed to ask me on your return, 'Have you seen M. d'Herblay?' or else, 'Have you received any letters for me from M. d'Herblay?'"—"Well, it is very natural that I should take an interest in my old friend," said D'Artagnan.

"Of course; but not to such an extent as to get thin from it."

—" Planchet, I'll get fatter; I give you my word of honour I will."—" Very well, Monsieur, I accept it; for I know that when you give your word of honour it is sacred."—" I will not dream of Aramis any longer, and I will never ask you again if there are any letters from M. d'Herblay; but on condition that you explain one thing to me."—" Tell me what it is, Monsieur."

" I am a great observer; and just now you made use of a very singular oath, which is unusual for you."—" You mean *Malaga!* I suppose? "—" Precisely."—" It is the oath I have used ever since I have been a grocer."—" Very proper, too; it is the name of a dried grape or raisin, I believe? "—" It is my most ferocious oath; when I have once said *Malaga!* I am a man no longer."

" Still, I never knew you to use that oath before."—" Very likely not, Monsieur. Some one gave it to me," said Planchet; and as he pronounced these words, he winked his eye with a cunning expression, which thoroughly awakened D'Artagnan's attention.—" Come, come, M. Planchet! "

" Why, I am not like you, Monsieur," said Planchet. " I don't pass my life in thinking."—" You are wrong, then."—" I mean in boring myself to death. We have but a very short time to live,—why not make the best of it? "—" You are an Epicurean philosopher, I begin to think, Planchet."—" Why not? My hand is still as steady as ever; I can write, and can weigh out my sugar and spices; my foot is firm; I can dance and walk about; my stomach has its teeth still, for I eat and digest well; my heart is not quite hardened. Well, Monsieur—" —" Well, what, Planchet? "—" Why, you see—" said the grocer, rubbing his hands together.

D'Artagnan crossed one leg over the other, and said, " Planchet, my friend, you overwhelm me with surprise! "—" How so? "—" You are revealing yourself to me in a character absolutely new." Planchet, flattered in the highest degree by this remark, continued to rub his hands very hard together. " Ah! " he said, " because I happen to be only stupid, you think me, perhaps, a positive fool."—" Very good, Planchet; very well reasoned."—" Follow my idea, Monsieur, if you please. I said to myself," continued Planchet, " that without enjoyment there is no happiness on this earth."—" Quite true,—what you say, Planchet," interrupted D'Artagnan.

" At all events, if we cannot obtain pleasure,—for pleasure is not so common a thing, after all,—let us at least get consolation of some kind or other."—" And so you console yourself? " —" Exactly so."—" Explain to me your method of consoling

yourself."—"I put on a buckler to fight against ennui. I rule my time by patience; and on the very evening before the day on which I perceive that I am going to get bored, I amuse myself."

"Is it no more difficult than that?"—"No."—"And you found it out quite by yourself?"—"Quite so."—"It is miraculous."—"What do you say?"—"I say, that your philosophy is not to be matched in the whole world."—"You think so? Follow my example, then."—"It is a very tempting one."—"Do as I do."—"I could not wish for anything better. But all minds are not of the same stamp; and it might possibly happen that if I were required to amuse myself in the manner you do, I should bore myself horribly."—"Bah! at least try it first."

"Well, tell me what you do."—"Have you observed that I leave home occasionally?"—"Yes."—"In any particular way?"—"Periodically."—"That's the very thing. You have noticed it, then?"—"My dear Planchet, you must understand that when two persons see each other nearly every day, and one of the two absents himself, the other misses him. Do not you feel the want of my society when I am in the country?"—"Prodigiously; that is to say, I feel like a body without a soul."

"That being understood, then, let us go on."—"What are the periods when I absent myself?"—"On the 15th and 30th of every month."—"And I remain away—"—"Sometimes two, sometimes three, and sometimes four days at a time."—"Have you ever given it a thought, what I have been absent for?"—"To look after your debts, I suppose."—"And when I returned, how did you think I looked?"—"Exceedingly satisfied."

"You admit, you see, that I always look very satisfied. And to what have you attributed my satisfaction?"—"To the fact that your business was going on very well; that your purchases of rice, prunes, brown sugar, dried apples and pears, and treacle were advantageous. You were always very picturesque in your notions and ideas, Planchet; and I was not in the slightest degree surprised to find that you had selected the grocer's trade as an occupation, which is of all trades the most varied and the very pleasantest in kind, since one handles in it so many natural and perfumed productions."

"Perfectly true, Monsieur; but you are very greatly mistaken."—"In what way?"—"In thinking that I go away like that, Monsieur, every fortnight to collect my money or to make purchases. Oh! how the deuce could you have thought

such a thing? Oh! oh! oh!" and Planchet began to laugh in a manner that inspired D'Artagnan with very serious misgivings as to his sanity.

"I confess," said the musketeer, "that I do not precisely catch your meaning."—"Very true, Monsieur."—"What do you mean by 'very true'?"—"It must be true, since you say it; but pray be assured that it in no way lessens my opinion of you."—"Ah! that is very fortunate."—"No. You are a man of genius; and whenever the question happens to be of war, tactics, surprises, or good honest blows to be dealt, why, kings are rubbish compared to you. But for the consolations of the mind, the proper care of the body, the agreeable things of life, if one may say so—ah, Monsieur, don't talk to me about men of genius; they are their own executioners."

"Good, Planchet!" said D'Artagnan, quite fidgety with curiosity; "upon my word, you interest me in the highest degree."

"You feel already less bored than you did just now, do you not?"—"I was not bored; yet since you have been talking to me I feel more amused."

"Very good, then; that is not a bad beginning. I will cure you, rely upon that."—"I ask nothing better."—"Will you let me try, then?"—"Immediately, if you like."

"Very well. Have you any horses here?"—"Yes; ten, twenty, thirty."—"Oh, there is no occasion for so many as that; two will be quite sufficient."—"They are at your disposal, Planchet."—"Very good; then I shall carry you off with me."—"When?"—"To-morrow."—"Where?"—"Ah! you are asking me too much."—"You will admit, however, that it is important that I should know where I am going."

"Do you like the country?"—"Only moderately, Planchet."—"Then you like the town better?"—"That is as it may be."—"Well, I am going to take you to a place half town and half country."—"Good."—"To a place where I am sure you will amuse yourself."—"Admirable!"—"Yes; and more wonderful still, to a place from which you have just returned, for the purpose only, it would seem, of getting bored here."—"It is to Fontainebleau you are going, then?"—"Exactly; to Fontainebleau."—"And, in Heaven's name, what are you going to do at Fontainebleau?"

Planchet answered D'Artagnan by a wink full of sly humour. "You have some property there, you rascal!"—"Oh, a very paltry affair; a little bit of a house,—nothing more!"—"I

understand you."—"But it is tolerable enough, I give you my word for it."—"I am going to Planchet's country-seat!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Whenever you like."—"Did we not say to-morrow?"—"To-morrow, if you like; and then, besides, to-morrow is the 14th,—that is to say, the day before the one when I am afraid of getting bored; so we will look upon it as an understood thing."—"Agreed."—"You will lend me one of your horses?"—"The best I have."—"No; I prefer the gentlest. I never was a very good rider, as you know, and in my grocery business I have got more awkward than ever; besides—"

"Besides what?"—"Why," added Planchet, with another wink, "I do not wish to fatigue myself."—"Why so?" D'Artagnan ventured to ask.—"Because I should lose half the pleasure I expect to enjoy," replied Planchet; and thereupon he rose from his sack of Indian corn, stretching himself, and making all his bones crack, one after the other, with a sort of harmony.

"Planchet, Planchet," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "I do declare that there is no sybarite, upon the whole face of the globe, who can be compared to you. Ah, Planchet, it is very clear that we have never yet eaten a ton of salt together."—"Why so, Monsieur?"—"Because even now I can scarcely say I know you," said D'Artagnan, "and because, in point of fact, I return to the opinion which for a moment I had formed of you on that day at Boulogne, when you strangled, or nearly strangled, M. de Wardes's valet, Lubin,—in plain language, Planchet, that you are a man of great resources." Planchet began to laugh with a laugh full of self-conceit; bade the musketeer good-night, and went downstairs to his back shop which he used as a bedroom. D'Artagnan resumed his original position upon his chair; and his brow, which had been unruffled for a moment, became more thoughtful than ever. He had already forgotten the whims and fancies of Planchet. "Yes," said he, taking up again the thread of his thoughts, which had been broken by the agreeable conversation in which we have just permitted our readers to participate,—"Yes, yes, those three points include everything: First, to ascertain what Baisemeaux wanted with Aramis; secondly, to learn why Aramis does not let me hear from him; and thirdly, to ascertain where Porthos is. The whole mystery lies in these three points. Since, therefore," continued D'Artagnan, "our friends tell us nothing, we must have recourse to our own poor intelligence. I must do what I can, *mordioux!* or rather *Malaga!* as Planchet says."

CHAPTER CXLI

A LETTER FROM M. DE BAISEMEAUX

D'Artagnan, faithful to his plan, went the very next morning to pay a visit to M. de Baisemeaux. It was cleaning day at the Bastille; the cannon were furbished up, the staircases scraped and cleaned; and the jailers seemed to be carefully engaged in polishing even the keys themselves. As for the soldiers belonging to the garrison, they were walking about in the different courtyards, under the pretence that they were clean enough. The governor, Baisemeaux, received D'Artagnan with more than ordinary politeness, but he behaved towards him with so marked a reserve of manner that all D'Artagnan's tact and cleverness could not get a syllable out of him. The more he kept himself within bounds, the more D'Artagnan's suspicion increased. The latter even fancied that he noticed that the governor was acting under the influence of a recent recommendation. Baisemeaux had not been at the Palais-Royal with D'Artagnan the same cold and impenetrable man which the latter now found in the Baisemeaux of the Bastille. When D'Artagnan wished to make him talk about the urgent money matters which had brought Baisemeaux in search of Aramis, and had rendered him expansive, notwithstanding what had passed on that evening, Baisemeaux pretended that he had some orders to give in the prison, and left D'Artagnan so long alone, waiting for him, that our musketeer, feeling sure that he should not get another syllable out of him, left the Bastille without waiting until Baisemeaux returned from his inspection.

But D'Artagnan's suspicions were aroused; and when once that was the case, D'Artagnan could not sleep or remain quiet for a moment. He was among men what the cat is among quadrupeds, the emblem of restlessness and impatience at the same moment. A restless cat no more remains in the same place than a silk thread does which is wafted idly to and fro with every breath of air. A cat on the watch is as motionless as death, fixed at its place of observation, and neither hunger nor thirst can draw it away from its meditation. D'Artagnan, who was burning with impatience, suddenly threw aside the feeling, like a cloak which he felt too heavy on his shoulders, and said to himself that what they were concealing from him was the

very thing it was important that he should know; and consequently he reasoned that Baisemeaux would not fail to put Aramis on his guard, if Aramis had given him any particular recommendation,—which was, in fact, the very thing that happened.

Baisemeaux had hardly had time to return from the donjon, when D'Artagnan placed himself in ambuscade close to the Rue du Petit-Muse, so as to see every one who might leave the gates of the Bastille. After he had spent an hour on the look-out from the Golden Portcullis, under the pent-house of which he could keep himself somewhat in the shade, D'Artagnan observed a soldier leave the Bastille. This was, indeed, the surest indication he could possibly have wished for, as every jailer or warder has certain days, and even certain hours, for leaving the Bastille, since all are alike prohibited from having either wives or lodgings in the castle, and can accordingly leave without exciting any curiosity; but a soldier once in barracks is kept there for four-and-twenty hours when on duty,—and no one knew this better than D'Artagnan. The soldier in question, therefore, was not likely to leave in his regimentals, except on an express and urgent order. The soldier, we were saying, left the Bastille at a slow and lounging pace, like a happy mortal, in fact, who instead of sentry duty before a wearisome guard-house or upon a bastion no less wearisome has the good luck to get a little liberty in addition to a walk,—the two pleasures being reckoned as part of his time on duty. He bent his steps towards the Faubourg St. Antoine, enjoying the fresh air and the warmth of the sun, and looking at all the pretty faces he passed. D'Artagnan followed him at a distance; he had not yet arranged his ideas as to what was to be done. "I must, first of all," he thought, "see the fellow's face. A man seen is a man judged of." D'Artagnan increased his pace, and, which was not very difficult, soon got in advance of the soldier. Not only did he observe that his face showed a tolerable amount of intelligence and resolution, but he noticed also that his nose was a little red. "The fellow has weakness for brandy, I see," said D'Artagnan to himself. At the same moment that he remarked his red nose, he saw that the soldier had a white paper in his belt. "Good! he has a letter," added D'Artagnan. The only difficulty was to get hold of the letter. A soldier would of course be too delighted at having been selected by M. de Baisemeaux as a special messenger, and would not be likely to sell his message. As D'Artagnan was biting his nails, the soldier

continued to advance farther and farther into the Faubourg St. Antoine. "He is certainly going to St. Mandé," he said to himself, "and I shall not be able to learn what the letter contains." It was enough to drive him wild. "If I were in uniform," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I would have the fellow seized and his letter with him. I could easily get assistance at the very first guard-house; but the devil take me if I mention my name in an affair of this kind! If I were to treat him to something to drink, his suspicions would be roused; and besides he would make me drunk. *Mordioux!* my wits seem to have left me," said D'Artagnan; "it is all over with me. Yet, supposing, I were to attack this poor devil, make him draw his sword, and kill him for the sake of his letter! No harm in that, if it were a question of a letter from a queen to a nobleman, or a letter from a cardinal to a queen; but what miserable intrigues are those of Messieurs Aramis and Fouquet with M. Colbert! A man's life for that! Oh, no, indeed; not even ten crowns."

As D'Artagnan philosophised in this manner, biting first his nails and then his moustaches, he perceived a group of archers and a commissary of police engaged in forcibly carrying away a man of very gentlemanly exterior, who was struggling with all his might against them. The archers had torn his clothes, and were dragging him roughly away. He begged that they would lead him along more respectfully, asserting that he was a gentleman and a soldier; and observing our soldier walking in the street, he called out, "Help, comrade!" The soldier walked on with the same step towards the man who had called out to him, followed by the crowd. An idea suddenly occurred to D'Artagnan; it was his first one, and we shall find that it was not a bad one, either. During the time the gentleman was relating to the soldier that he had just been seized in a house as a thief, when the truth was he was only there as a lover; and while the soldier was pitying him, and offering him consolation and advice with that gravity which a French soldier has always ready whenever his vanity or his *esprit de corps* is concerned,—D'Artagnan glided behind the soldier, who was closely hemmed in by the crowd, and quickly and deftly drew the paper out of his belt. As at this moment the gentleman with the torn clothes was pulling about the soldier to show how the commissary police had pulled him about, D'Artagnan effected his capture of the letter without the slightest inconvenience. He stationed himself about ten paces distant, behind the pillar

of an adjoining house, and read the address, "To M. du Vallon, at M. Fouquet's, St. Mandé."

"Good!" he said; and then he unsealed without tearing the letter, drew out the paper, which was folded in four, and which contained only these words:—

"DEAR M. DU VALLON.—Will you be good enough to tell M. d'Herblay that *he* has been to the Bastille, and has been asking questions?—Your devoted, DE BAISEMEAUX."

"Very good! all right!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "it is clear enough now. Porthos is engaged in it." Being now satisfied of what he wished to know: "*Mordioux!*" thought the musketeer, "there is that poor devil of a soldier, whom that hot-headed, cunning fellow, De Baisemeaux, will make to pay dearly for my trick. If he returns without the letter, what will they do to him? Besides, I don't want the letter; when the egg has been sucked, what is the good of the shell?" D'Artagnan perceived that the commissary and the archers had succeeded in convincing the soldier, and had gone on their way with the prisoner, the latter being still surrounded by the crowd and continuing his complaints. D'Artagnan advanced into the very middle of the crowd, let the letter fall, without any one having observed him, and then retreated rapidly. The soldier resumed his route towards St. Mandé, his mind much occupied with the gentleman who had implored his protection. Suddenly he thought of his letter, and looking at his belt saw that it was no longer there. D'Artagnan derived no little satisfaction from his sudden terrified cry. The poor soldier in the greatest anguish of mind looked round him on every side, and at last, about twenty paces behind him, perceived the blessed envelope. He pounced on it like a falcon on its prey. The envelope was certainly a little dusty and rather crumpled, but at all events the letter was found again. D'Artagnan observed that the broken seal puzzled the soldier a good deal; but he apparently satisfied himself, and returned the letter to his belt. "Go on," said D'Artagnan, "I have plenty of time before me, so you may precede me. It appears that Aramis is not at Paris, since Baisemeaux writes to Porthos. Dear Porthos, how delighted I shall be to see him again, and to have some conversation with him!" said the Gascon; and regulating his pace according to that of the soldier, he promised himself to arrive a quarter of an hour after him at M. Fouquet's.

CHAPTER CXLII

IN WHICH THE READER WILL BE DELIGHTED TO FIND THAT PORTHOS HAS LOST NOTHING OF HIS STRENGTH

D'ARTAGNAN had, according to his usual style, calculated that every hour is worth sixty minutes, and every minute worth sixty seconds. Thanks to this perfectly exact calculation of minutes and seconds, he reached the superintendent's door at the very moment when the soldier was leaving it with his belt empty. D'Artagnan presented himself at the door, which a porter with a profusely embroidered livery held half open for him. D'Artagnan would very much have liked to enter without giving his name; but this was impossible, and so he gave it. Notwithstanding this concession, which ought to have removed every difficulty in the way,—at least D'Artagnan thought so,—the doorkeeper hesitated; however, at the second repetition of the title, captain of the king's musketeers, the doorkeeper, without quite leaving the passage clear for him, ceased to bar it completely. D'Artagnan understood that orders of the most positive character had been given. He decided, therefore, to tell a falsehood,—a circumstance, moreover, which did not very seriously affect his peace of mind, when he saw that beyond the falsehood the safety of the State itself, or even purely and simply his own individual personal interest, might be at stake. He therefore added to the statements which he had already made, that the soldier who had just brought a letter to M. du Vallon was his own messenger, and that the only object of that letter was to announce his intended arrival.

From that moment no one opposed D'Artagnan's entrance any further, and he entered accordingly. A valet wished to accompany him; but he answered that it was useless to take that trouble on his account, inasmuch as he knew perfectly well where M. du Vallon was. There was nothing, of course, to say to a man so thoroughly and completely informed, and D'Artagnan was permitted to do as he liked. The terraces, the magnificent apartments, the gardens, were all reviewed and narrowly inspected by the musketeer. He walked for a quarter of an hour in this more than royal residence, which included as many wonders as articles of furniture, and as many servants as

there were columns and doors. "Decidedly," he said to himself, "this mansion has no other limits than the limits of the earth. Is it probable that Porthos has taken it into his head to go back to Pierrefonds without even leaving M. Fouquet's house?" He finally reached a remote part of the château, enclosed by a stone wall upon which climbed a profusion of thick plants, luxuriant in blossoms as large and solid as fruit. At equal distances on the top of this enclosing wall were placed various statues in timid or mysterious attitudes. These were vestals hidden beneath the long Greek peplum, with its thick, heavy folds; agile watchers, covered with their marble veils, and guarding the palace with their furtive glances. A statue of Hermes, with his finger on his lips; one of Iris, with extended wings; another of Night, sprinkled all over with poppies,—ruled over the gardens and the outbuildings, which could be seen through the trees. All these statues threw in white relief their profiles upon the dark ground of the tall cypresses, which shot up their black summits toward the sky. Around these cypresses were entwined climbing roses, whose flowering rings were fastened to every fork of the branches, and spread over the lower boughs and upon the various statues showers of petals of the richest fragrance.

These enchantments seemed to the musketeer the result of the greatest efforts of the human mind. He felt in a dreamy, almost poetical frame of mind. The idea that Porthos was living in so perfect an Eden gave him a higher idea of Porthos,—showing how true it is that even the very highest orders of minds are not quite exempt from the influence of surrounding circumstances. D'Artagnan found the door, and at the door a kind of spring which he detected; having touched it, the door flew open. D'Artagnan entered, closed the door behind him, and advanced into a pavilion built in a circular form, in which no other sound could be heard but cascades and the songs of birds. At the door of the pavilion he met a lackey. "It is here, I believe," said D'Artagnan, without hesitation, "that M. le Baron du Vallon is staying?"—"Yes, Monsieur," answered the lackey.—"Have the goodness to tell him that M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of his Majesty's musketeers, is waiting to see him."

D'Artagnan was introduced into a parlour, and had not long to remain in expectation. A well-remembered step shook the floor of the adjoining room; a door opened, or rather flew open, and Porthos appeared, and threw himself into his friend's arms

with a sort of embarrassment which did not ill become him. "You here?" he exclaimed.—"And you?" replied D'Artagnan. "Ah, you sly fellow!"—"Yes," said Porthos, with a somewhat embarrassed smile; "yes, you see I am staying in M. Fouquet's house, at which you are not a little surprised, I suppose?"—"Not at all; why should you not be one of M. Fouquet's friends? M. Fouquet has a very large number of friends, particularly among clever men."

Porthos had the modesty not to take the compliment to himself. "Besides," he added, "you saw me at Belle-Isle."—"A greater reason for my believing you to be one of M. Fouquet's friends."—"The fact is, I am acquainted with him," said Porthos, with a certain embarrassment of manner.—"Ah, friend Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "how treacherously you have behaved towards me!"—"In what way?" exclaimed Porthos.

"What! you completed so admirable a work as the fortifications of Belle-Isle, and you did not tell me of it!" Porthos coloured. "Nay, more than that," continued D'Artagnan, "you saw me out yonder, you know I am in the king's service, and yet you could not guess that the king, jealously desirous of learning the name of the man whose abilities have wrought a work of which he has heard the most wonderful accounts,—you could not guess, I say, that the king sent me to learn who this man was."—"What! the king sent you to learn—"—"Of course; but don't let us speak of that any more."

"*Corne de bœuf!*" said Porthos; "on the contrary, we will speak of it; and so the king knew that we were fortifying Belle-Isle?"—"Of course; does not the king know everything?"—"But he did not know who was fortifying it."—"No; he only suspected, from what he had been told of the nature of the works, that it was some celebrated soldier."—"The devil!" said Porthos, "if I had only known that!"—"You would not have run away from Vannes as you did, perhaps?"—"No; what did you say when you couldn't find me?"—"My dear fellow, I reflected."—"Ah, indeed, you reflected, did you? Well, and to what did that reflection lead?"—"It led me to guess the whole truth."—"Come, then, tell me, what did you guess, after all?" said Porthos, settling himself into an arm-chair and assuming the airs of a sphinx.

"I guessed, in the first place, that you were fortifying Belle-Isle."—"There was no great difficulty in that, for you saw me at work."—"Wait a minute; I also guessed something else,—that you were fortifying Belle-Isle by M. Fouquet's orders."—

"That's true."—"But that is not all. Whenever I feel myself in a mood for guessing, I do not stop half-way; and so I guessed that M. Fouquet wished to preserve the most absolute secrecy respecting these fortifications."—"I believe that was his intention, in fact," said Porthos.

"Yes; but do you know why he wished to keep it secret?"—"Why, in order that it should not be known," said Porthos.

"That was his principal reason. But his wish was subservient to an act of generosity—"—"In fact," said Porthos, "I have heard it said that M. Fouquet was a very generous man."—"—to an act of generosity which he wished to exhibit towards the king."—"Oh, oh!"—"You seem surprised at it?"—"Yes."—"And you did not know that?"—"No."—"Well, I know it, then."—"You're a wizard."—"Not in the slightest degree."—"How do you know it, then?"—"By a very simple means. I heard M. Fouquet himself say so to the king."

"Say what to the king?"—"That he had fortified Belle-Isle on his Majesty's account, and that he made him a present of Belle-Isle."—"And you heard M. Fouquet say that to the king?"—"In those very words. He even added, 'Belle-Isle has been fortified by an engineer, one of my friends, a man of a great deal of merit, whom I shall ask your Majesty's permission to present to you.' 'What is his name?' asked the king. 'The Baron du Vallon,' M. Fouquet replied. 'Very well,' returned his Majesty, 'you will present him to me.'"—"The king said that?"—"Upon the word of a D'Artagnan!"

"Oh!" said Porthos. "Why have I not been presented, then?"—"Have they not, then, spoken to you about this presentation?"—"Yes, certainly; but I am always kept waiting for it."—"Be easy! it will be sure to come."—"Humph! humph!" grumbled Porthos.

D'Artagnan pretended not to hear this; and changing the conversation, he said, "You seem to be living in a very solitary place here, my dear fellow?"—"I always preferred retirement; I am of a melancholy disposition," replied Porthos, with a sigh.—"Really, that is odd," said D'Artagnan; "I never remarked that in you."—"It is only since I have taken to study," said Porthos, with a thoughtful air.

"But the labours of the mind have not affected the health of the body, I trust?"—"Oh, not at all!"—"Your strength is as great as ever?"—"Too great, my friend, too great."—"Ah! I had heard that for a short time after your arrival—"—"That I could hardly move a limb, I suppose?"—"How was it?"

said D'Artagnan, smiling; "and why was it you could not move?"

Porthos perceived that he had made a mistake, and wished to correct it. "Yes, I came from Belle-Isle here upon very hard horses," he said; "and that fatigued me."—"I am no longer astonished, then, since I, who followed you, found seven or eight lying dead on the road."—"I am very heavy, you know," said Porthos.—"So that you were bruised all over."—"My fat melted, and that made me very ill."—"Poor Porthos! But how did Aramis act towards you under those circumstances?"

"Very well indeed. He had me attended to by M. Fouquet's own doctor. But just imagine, at the end of a week I could not breathe any longer."—"What do you mean?"—"The room was too small; I absorbed too much air."—"Indeed?"—"I was told so, at least; and so I was removed into another apartment."—"Where you were able to breathe, I hope."—"Yes, more freely; but I had no exercise,—nothing to do. The doctor insisted that I was not to stir; I, on the contrary, felt that I was stronger than ever. That was the cause of a very serious accident."

"What accident?"—"Fancy, my dear fellow, that I revolted against the directions of that ass of a doctor, and I resolved to go out, whether it suited him or not; and consequently I told the valet who waited on me to bring me my clothes."—"You were quite naked, then, my dear Porthos?"—"Oh, no! on the contrary, I had a magnificent dressing-gown to wear. The lackey obeyed. I dressed myself in my own clothes, which had become too large for me; but, what was very strange, my feet had become too large."—"Yes, I quite understand."—"And my boots had become too small."—"You mean your feet were still swollen."—"Exactly; you have hit it."

"*Parbleu!* And is that the accident you were going to tell me about?"—"Oh, yes! I did not come to the same conclusion that you have reached. I said to myself, 'Since my feet have entered my boots ten times, there is no reason why they should not go in the eleventh.'"—"Allow me to tell you, my dear Porthos, that on this occasion you failed in your logic."—"In short, then, I happened to be sitting opposite a partition. I tried to get my right boot on; I pulled it with my hands, I pushed with all the strength of the muscles of my leg, making the most unheard-of efforts, when suddenly the two tags of my boot remained in my hands, and my foot struck out like a catapult."

"Catapult! how learned you are in fortifications, dear Porthos!"—"My foot darted out like a catapult, and came against the partition, which gave way. My friend, I really thought that, like Samson, I had demolished the temple: the number of pictures, the quantity of china, vases of flowers, tapestries, and window-poles which fell down was really wonderful."—"Indeed!"—"Without reckoning that on the other side of the partition was a set of shelves laden with china—"—"Which you knocked over?"—"Which I dashed to the other side of the room," said Porthos, laughing.

"Upon my word it is, as you say, astonishing," replied D'Artagnan, beginning to laugh also; whereupon Porthos laughed louder than ever.—"I broke," said Porthos, in a voice half choked from his increasing mirth, "more than three thousand livres worth of china—ha! ha! ha!"—"Good!" said D'Artagnan.—"I smashed more than four thousand livres worth of glass—ha! ha! ha!"—"Excellent!"—"Without counting a lustre, which fell on my head and was broken into a thousand pieces—ha! ha! ha!"

"Upon your head?" said D'Artagnan, holding his sides.—"Right on the top."—"But your head must have been broken?"—"No, since I tell you, on the contrary, my dear fellow, that it was the lustre which was broken like glass, as it was, indeed."—"Ah! the lustre was glass, you say."—"Venetian glass! a perfect curiosity, quite matchless indeed, and it weighed two hundred pounds."—"And it fell upon your head!"—"Upon—my—head. Just imagine a globe of crystal, gilded all over, the lower part beautifully encrusted, perfumes burning at the top, and jets from which flame issued when they were lighted!"

"I quite understand; but they were not lighted at the time?"—"Happily not, or I should have been set on fire."—"And you were only knocked flat?"—"Not at all."—"How, not at all?"—"Why, the lustre fell on my skull. It appears that we have upon the top of our heads an exceedingly thick crust."—"Who told you that, Porthos?"—"The doctor. A sort of dome which would bear Notre Dame, at Paris."—"Bah!"—"Yes, it seems that our skulls are made in that manner."

"Speak for yourself, my dear fellow! it is your own skull that is made in that manner, and not the skulls of other people."—"Well, that may be so," said Porthos, conceitedly; "so true was it in my case, at least, that no sooner did the lustre fall upon the dome which we have at the top of our heads, than there was a report like a cannon, the crystal was broken to pieces, and I

fell, covered from head to foot."—"With blood, poor Porthos!"—"Not at all; with perfumes, which smelt like rich creams. It was delicious; but the odour was too strong, and I felt quite giddy from it. Perhaps you have experienced it sometimes yourself, D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, in inhaling the scent of the lily of the valley; so that, my poor friend, you were knocked over by the shock and overpowered by the odour?"—"Yes; but what is very remarkable,—for the doctor told me, upon my word, that he had never seen anything like it—"—"You had a bump on your head, at least?" interrupted D'Artagnan.—"I had five."—"Why five?"—"I will tell you; the lustre had, at its lower extremity, five gilt ornaments, extremely sharp."—"Oh!"—"Well, these five ornaments penetrated my hair, which, as you see, I wear very thick."—"Fortunately so."—"And they made a mark on my skin. But just notice the singularity of it,—these things seem really only to happen to me!—instead of making indentations, they made bumps! The doctor could never succeed in explaining that to me satisfactorily."

"Well, then, I will explain it to you."—"You will do me a great service if you will," said Porthos, winking his eyes, which with him was a sign of the profoundest attention.

"Since you have been employing your brain in studies of an exalted character, in important calculations, and so on, the head has gained a certain advantage, so that your head is now too full of science."—"Do you think so?"—"I am sure of it. The result is that instead of allowing any foreign matter to penetrate the interior of the head, your bony box or skull, which is already too full, avails itself of the openings which are made in it to allow this excess to escape."—"Ah!" said Porthos, to whom this explanation appeared clearer than that of the doctor.

"The five protuberances caused by the five ornaments of the lustre must certainly have been scientific masses, brought to the surface by the force of circumstances."—"In fact," said Porthos, "the real truth is that I felt far worse outside my head than inside. I will even confess that when I put my hat upon my head, clapping it on with that graceful energy which we gentlemen of the sword possess, if my hand was not very gently applied, I experienced the most painful sensations."—"I quite believe you, Porthos."—"Therefore, my good friend," said the giant, "M. Fouquet decided, seeing how slightly built the house was, to give me another lodging; and so they brought me here."

—"It is the private park, is it not?"—"Yes."—"Where the rendezvous are made,—that park, indeed, which is so celebrated in some of those mysterious stories about the superintendent."

"I don't know. I have had no rendezvous or mysterious stories here myself; but they have authorised me to exercise my muscles, and I take advantage of the permission by rooting up some of the trees."—"What for?"—"To keep my hand in, and also to get some birds'-nests; I find that more convenient than climbing up the trees."—"You are as pastoral as Tyrcis, my dear Porthos."—"Yes, I like the small eggs; I like them very much better than larger ones. You have no idea how delicate an omelet is, if made of four or five hundred eggs of linnets, chaffinches, starlings, blackbirds, and thrushes."—"But five hundred eggs is perfectly monstrous!"—"A salad-bowl will hold them easily enough," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan looked at Porthos admiringly for full five minutes, as if he had seen him for the first time, while Porthos proudly expanded beneath his friend's gaze. They remained in this state several minutes, Porthos smiling, and D'Artagnan looking at him. D'Artagnan was evidently seeking to give the conversation a new turn. "Do you amuse yourself much here, Porthos?" he asked at last, very likely after he had found out what he was searching for.—"Not always."—"I can imagine that; but when you get thoroughly bored, by and by, what do you intend to do?"—"Oh! I shall not be here for any length of time. Aramis is waiting until the last bump on my head disappears, in order to present me to the king, who I am told cannot endure the sight of a bump."

"Aramis is still in Paris, then?"—"No."—"Whereabouts is he, then?"—"At Fontainebleau."—"Alone?"—"With M. Fouquet."—"Very good. But do you happen to know one thing?"—"No; tell it me, and then I shall know."—"Well, then, I think that Aramis is forgetting you."—"Do you really think so?"—"Yes; for at Fontainebleau yonder, you must know, they are laughing, dancing, banqueting, and drawing the corks of M. de Mazarin's wine in fine style. Are you aware that they have a ballet there every evening?"—"The deuce they have!"

"I declare that your dear Aramis is forgetting you."—"Well, that is not at all unlikely, and I have myself thought so sometimes."—"Unless he is playing you a trick, the sly fellow!"—"Oh!"—"You know that Aramis is as sly as a fox."—"Yes, but to play me a trick—"

"Listen; in the first place, he puts you under a sort of sequestration."—"He sequesters me! Do you mean to say I am sequestered?"—"I think so."—"I wish you would have the goodness to prove that to me."—"Nothing easier. Do you ever go out?"—"Never."—"Do you ever ride on horseback?"—"Never."—"Are your friends allowed to come and see you?"—"Never."—"Very well, then, my friend; never to go out, never to ride on horseback, never to see your friends, —that is called being sequestered."

"But why should Aramis sequester me?" inquired Porthos. —"Come," said D'Artagnan, "be frank, Porthos!"—"As gold."—"It was Aramis who drew the plan of the fortifications at Belle-Isle, was it not?" Porthos coloured as he said, "Yes; but that was all that he did."—"Exactly; and my own opinion is that it was no very great affair, after all."—"That is mine too."—"Very good; I am delighted that we are of the same opinion."—"He never even came to Belle-Isle," said Porthos.

"There now, you see!"—"It was I who went to Vannes, as you may have seen."—"Say, rather, as I did see. Well, that is precisely the state of the case, my dear Porthos. Aramis, who only drew the plans, wishes to pass himself off as the engineer, while you, who stone by stone built the wall, the citadel, and the bastions, he wishes to reduce to the rank of a mere builder."—"By builder you mean mason, perhaps?"—"Mason; the very word."—"Plasterer, in fact?"—"Precisely." —"A labourer?"—"Exactly."—"Oh, my dear Aramis, you seem to think you are only five-and-twenty years of age still!" —"Yes; and that is not all, for he believes you are fifty."

"I should have liked amazingly to see him at work."—"Yes, indeed."—"A fellow who has got the gout!"—"Yes."—"The gravel!"—"Yes."—"Who has lost three of his teeth!"—"Four."—"While I—look at mine!" and Porthos, opening his large mouth very wide, displayed two rows of teeth rather less white than snow, but as even, hard, and sound as ivory.

"You can hardly believe, Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "what a fancy the king has for good teeth. Yours decide me; I will present you to the king myself."—"You?"—"Why not? Do you think I have less credit at court than Aramis?"—"Oh, no!"—"Do you think that I have the slightest pretensions in regard to the fortifications at Belle-Isle?"—"Oh, certainly not!"—"It is your own interest alone, which would induce me to do it."—"I don't doubt it in the least."—"Well, I am the intimate friend of the king; and a proof of that is that whenever

there is anything disagreeable to tell him, it is I who have to do it."

"But, dear friend, if you present me—"—"Well!"—"Aramis will be angry."—"With me?"—"No, with me."—"Bah! whether it be he or I who presents you, since you are to be presented, what does it matter?"—"They were going to get me some clothes made."—"Your own are splendid."—"Oh, those I had ordered were far more beautiful!"—"Take care; the king likes simplicity."

"In that case I will be simple. But what will M. Fouquet say, when he learns that I have left?"—"Are you a prisoner, then, on parole?"—"No, not quite that; but I promised him that I would not leave without letting him know."—"Wait a minute; we shall return to that presently. Have you anything to do here?"—"I? nothing; nothing of any importance, at least."—"Unless, indeed, you are Aramis's representative for something of importance."—"By no means."

"What I tell you, pray understand that, is out of interest for you. I suppose, for instance, that you are commissioned to send Aramis messages and letters."—"Ah! letters—yes, I send certain letters to him."—"Where?"—"To Fontainebleau."—"Have you any letters, then?"—"But—"—"Nay, let me speak. Have you any letters, I say?"—"I have just received one for him."—"Interesting?"—"I suppose so."—"You do not read them, then?"—"I am not at all curious," said Porthos, and he drew out of his pocket the soldier's letter, which Porthos had not read, but which D'Artagnan had.

"Do you know what to do with it?" said D'Artagnan.—"Of course; do as I always do,—send it to him."—"Not so."—"Why not? Keep it, then?"—"No, not quite that. Did they not tell you that this letter was important?"—"Very important."—"Well, you must take it yourself to Fontainebleau."

"To Aramis?"—"Yes."—"Very good."—"And since the king is there—"—"You will profit by that."—"I shall profit by the opportunity to present you to the king."—"Ah, *corne de bœuf!* D'Artagnan, there is no one like you to find expedients."

"Therefore, instead of forwarding to our friend any messages, which may or may not be faithfully delivered, we will ourselves be the bearers of the letter."—"I had never even thought of that, and yet it is simple enough."—"And therefore, because it is urgent, Porthos, we ought to set off at once."—"In fact," said Porthos, "the sooner we set off, the less chance there is of Aramis's letter meeting with any delay."—"Porthos, your

reasoning is always forcible, and in your case logic seems to serve as an auxiliary to the imagination."—"Do you think so?" said Porthos.—"It is the result of your hard reading," replied D'Artagnan. "So come along; let us be off!"

"But," said Porthos, "my promise to M. Fouquet?"—"Which?"—"Not to leave St. Mandé without telling him of it."—"Ah, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "how very young you are!"—"In what way?"—"You are going to Fontainebleau, are you not, where you will find M. Fouquet?"—"Yes."—"Probably in the king's palace."—"'In the king's palace,'" repeated Porthos, with an air full of majesty.

"Well, you will accost him with these words, 'M. Fouquet, I have the honour to inform you that I have just left St. Mandé.'"—"And," said Porthos, with the same majestic mien, "seeing me at Fontainebleau at the king's, M. Fouquet will not be able to tell me that I am not speaking the truth."—"My dear Porthos, I was just on the point of opening my lips to make the same remark, but you anticipate me in everything. Oh, Porthos, how fortunately you are gifted! Age has not made any impression on you."—"Not over-much."

"Then there is nothing more to say?"—"I think not."—"All your scruples are removed?"—"Quite so."—"In that case I shall carry you off with me."—"Exactly; and I shall go and get my horses saddled."—"You have horses here, then?"—"I have five."—"You had them sent from Pierrefonds, I suppose?"—"No, M. Fouquet gave them to me."—"My dear Porthos, we shall not want five horses for two persons; besides, I have already three in Paris, which will make eight, and that will be too many."

"It would not be too many if I had my servants here; but, alas! they are not here."—"Do you miss them, then?"—"I miss Mousqueton; I need Mousqueton."—"What a good-hearted fellow you are, Porthos!" said D'Artagnan; "but the best thing you can do is to leave your horses here, as you have left Mousqueton out yonder."—"Why so?"—"Because, by and by, it might turn out a very good thing if M. Fouquet had never given you anything at all."—"I don't understand you," said Porthos.

"It is not necessary that you should understand."—"But yet—"—"I will explain to you later, Porthos."—"I'll wager it is some piece of policy or other."—"Of the most subtle character," returned D'Artagnan.

Porthos bent his head at this word, "policy;" then, after a

moment's reflection, he added, "I confess, D'Artagnan, that I am no politician."—"I know that well."—"Oh, every one knows that! You have said it to me yourself,—you the bravest of the brave."—"What did I say to you, Porthos?"—"That every man has his days. You told me so, and I have experienced it myself. There are certain days when one feels less pleasure than on others in exposing one's self to sword-thrusts."—"Exactly my own idea."—"And mine, too, although I can hardly believe in blows or thrusts which kill outright."

"The deuce! yet you have killed a few in your time."—"Yes; but I have never been killed."—"Your reason is a very good one."—"Therefore I do not believe that I shall ever die from a sword-thrust or a gun-shot."

"In that case, then, you are afraid of nothing. Ah! of water perhaps?"—"Oh! I swim like an otter."—"Of a quartan fever, then?"—"I never had one yet, and I don't believe I ever shall; but there is one thing I will admit;" and Porthos lowered his voice—"What is that?" asked D'Artagnan, adopting the same tone which Porthos had used.—"I must confess," repeated Porthos, "that I am horribly afraid of political matters."

"Oh, bah!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.—"Upon my word, it's true," said Porthos, in a stentorian voice. "I have seen his eminence M. le Cardinal de Richelieu and his eminence M. le Cardinal de Mazarin; the one was a red politician, the other a black politician. I have never felt very much more satisfied with the one than with the other. The first struck off the heads of M. de Marillac, M. de Thou, M. de Cinq-Mars, M. de Chalais, M. de Boutteville, and M. de Montmorency; the second got a whole crowd of Frondeurs cut in pieces,—and we belonged to them, my dear fellow."—"On the contrary, we did not belong to them," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh, indeed, yes; for if I unsheathed my sword for the cardinal, I struck for the king."—"Dear Porthos!"—"Well, I have done. My dread of politics is such that if there is any question of politics in the matter, I should much prefer to return to Pierrefonds."—"You would be quite right if that were the case; but with me, dear Porthos, there is no question of politics, that is quite clear. You have laboured hard in fortifying Belle-Isle; the king wished to know the name of the clever engineer who had constructed the works. You are modest, as all men of true genius are. Perhaps Aramis wishes to put you under a bushel. But I happen to seize hold of you; I make it known who you are; I produce you; the king rewards you;

and that is all the politics I have to do with."—"And all I will have to do with, either," said Porthos, holding out his hand to D'Artagnan.

But D'Artagnan knew Porthos's grasp; he knew that once imprisoned within the baron's five fingers, no ordinary hand ever left it without being half crushed. He therefore held out to his friend, not his hand, but his fist; and Porthos did not even perceive the difference. Then they set off from St. Mandé. The servants talked a little with one another in an undertone, and whispered a few words which D'Artagnan understood, but which he took very good care not to let Porthos understand. "Our friend," he said to himself, "was really and truly Aramis's prisoner. Let us now see what will be the result of the liberation of this conspirator."

CHAPTER CXLIII

THE RAT AND THE CHEESE

D'Artagnan and Porthos returned on foot, as D'Artagnan had come. When D'Artagnan, as he entered the shop of the Pilon d'Or, had announced to Planchet that M. du Vallon would be one of the privileged travellers, and when the plume in Porthos's hat had made the wooden candles which swung overhead rattle together, something almost like a melancholy presentiment troubled the delight which Planchet had promised himself for the next day. But the grocer's heart was of sterling metal, a precious relic of the good old time,—which is always for those who are getting old the time of their youth, and for those who are young the time of their ancestors. Planchet, notwithstanding the sort of inward shiver which he checked as soon as he experienced it, received Porthos, therefore, with a respect mingled with the most tender cordiality. Porthos, who was a little cold and stiff in his manners at first, on account of the social difference which existed at that period between a baron and a grocer, soon began to get a little softened when he perceived so much good-feeling and so many kind attentions in Planchet. He was particularly touched by the liberty which was permitted him, nay, even offered him, of plunging his large hands into the boxes of dried fruits and preserves, into the sacks of nuts and almonds, and into the drawers full of sweetmeats; so that, notwithstanding Planchet's pressing invitations to go upstairs

to the *entresol*, he chose as his favourite abiding-place, during the evening which he had to spend at Planchet's house, the shop itself, where his fingers could always find whatever his nose had first discovered for him. Delicious figs from Provence, filberts from the forest, and Tours plums were subjects of his uninterrupted attention for five consecutive hours. His teeth, like millstones, cracked the shells, which were scattered all over the floor, where they were trampled by every one who went in and out of the shop. Porthos pulled from the stalk with his lips, at one mouthful, bunches of the rich Muscatel raisins with their beautiful bloom, a half-pound of which thus passed at one gulp from his mouth to his stomach.

In a corner of the shop Planchet's assistants, crouching down in a fright, looked at one another without venturing to open their lips. They did not know who Porthos was, for they had never seen him before. The race of those Titans who had worn the cuirasses of Hugh Capet, Philip Augustus, and Francis I. had already begun to disappear. They asked themselves mentally if he might not possibly be the ogre of the fairy tale, who was going to turn the whole contents of Planchet's shop into his insatiable stomach, and that, too, without in the slightest degree displacing the barrels and boxes that were in it.

Munching, chewing, cracking, nibbling, sucking, and swallowing, Porthos occasionally said to the grocer, "You do a very good business here, friend Planchet."—"He will very soon have none at all to do, if this continues," grumbled the foreman, who had Planchet's word that he should be his successor; and in his despair he approached Porthos, who blocked up the whole of the passage leading from the back shop to the shop itself. He hoped that Porthos would rise, and that this movement would distract his devouring ideas.—"What do you want, my man?" asked Porthos, very affably.

"I should like to pass you, Monsieur, if it would not trouble you too much."—"Very well," said Porthos; "it will not trouble me in the least." At the same moment he took hold of the young fellow by the waistband, lifted him off the ground, and placed him very gently on the other side, smiling all the while with the same affable expression.

As soon as Porthos had placed him on the ground, the lad's legs so shook under him that he fell back upon some sacks of corks. But noticing the giant's gentleness of manner, he ventured again, and said, "Ah, Monsieur, pray be careful!"—"What about, my man?" inquired Porthos.—"You are

positively putting fire into your body."—"How is that, my good fellow?" said Porthos.

"All those things are very heating to the system, Monsieur."—"Which?"—"Raisins, nuts, and almonds."—"Yes; but if raisins, nuts, and almonds are heating—"—"There is no doubt at all of it, Monsieur."—"—honey is very cooling," said Porthos, stretching out his hand towards a small keg of honey which was open; and he plunged into it the scoop with which the wants of the customers were supplied, and swallowed a good half-pound at one gulp.

"I must trouble you for some water now, my man," said Porthos.—"In a pail, Monsieur?" asked the lad, innocently.—"No, in a water-bottle; that will be quite enough," replied Porthos, good-humouredly; and raising the bottle to his mouth, as a trumpeter does his trumpet, he emptied the bottle at a single draught. Planchet was touched in all the sentiments which correspond to the fibres of ownership and self-love. However, a worthy representative of the hospitality which prevailed in early days, he feigned to be talking very earnestly with D'Artagnan, and incessantly repeated: "Ah, Monsieur, what a happiness! what an honour!"

"What time shall we have supper, Planchet?" inquired Porthos; "I feel hungry." The foreman clasped his hands together. The two others got under the counters, fearing that Porthos might have a taste for human flesh. "We shall take only a light luncheon here," said D'Artagnan; "and when we once get to Planchet's country-seat, we shall have supper."

"Ah! so we are going to your country-house, Planchet?" said Porthos; "so much the better!"—"You overwhelm me, Monsieur the Baron." The "Monsieur the Baron" had a great effect upon the men, who detected a personage of the highest quality in an appetite of that kind. This title, too, reassured them. They had never heard that an ogre was ever called "Monsieur the Baron." "I will take a few biscuits to eat on the road," said Porthos, carelessly; and so saying, he emptied a whole jar of aniseed biscuits into the huge pocket of his doublet.

"My shop is saved!" exclaimed Planchet.—"Yes, as the cheese was," said the foreman.—"What cheese?"—"That Dutch cheese inside which a rat had made his way, and we found only the rind left." Planchet looked all round his shop, and observing the different articles which had escaped Porthos's teeth, he found the comparison somewhat exaggerated. The

foreman, who perceived what was passing in his master's mind, said, "Take care! he has not gone yet."

"Have you any fruit here?" said Porthos, as he went upstairs to the *entresol*, where it had just been announced that some refreshment was prepared. "Alas!" sighed the grocer, giving D'Artagnan a look full of entreaty, which the latter half understood.

As soon as they had finished eating, they set off. It was late when the three riders, who had left Paris about six in the evening, entered upon the paved street of Fontainebleau. The journey had passed very agreeably. Porthos took a fancy to Planchet's society, because the latter was very respectful in his manners and seemed delighted to talk to him about his meadows, his woods, and his rabbit-warrens. Porthos had all the taste and pride of a landed proprietor.

When D'Artagnan saw his two companions in earnest conversation, he took the opposite side of the road, and letting his bridle drop upon his horse's neck separated himself from the whole world, as he had done from Porthos and from Planchet. The moon shone softly through the dark foliage of the forest. The balmy odours of the open country rose to the horses' nostrils, and they snorted and pranced about with delight. Porthos and Planchet began to talk about hay-crops. Planchet admitted to Porthos that in the more advanced years of his life he had certainly neglected agricultural pursuits for commerce, but that his childhood had been passed in Picardy, in the beautiful meadows where the grass grew as high as the knees, and where he had played under the green apple-trees covered with red-cheeked fruit; he went on to say that he had solemnly promised himself that as soon as he should have made his fortune he would return to Nature, and end his days as he had begun them, as near as he possibly could to the earth itself, where all men must go at last.—"Eh! eh!" said Porthos; "in that case, my dear M. Planchet, your retreat is not far distant."—"How so?"—"Why, you seem to be in the way of making your fortune very soon."—"Well, we are getting on pretty well, I must admit," replied Planchet.

"Come, tell me, what is the extent of your ambition, and what is the amount you intend to retire upon?"—"There is one circumstance, Monsieur," said Planchet, without answering the question, however interesting it may have been, "which occasions me a good deal of anxiety."—"What is it?" inquired Porthos, looking all round him as if in search of the circum-

stance that annoyed Planchet, and desirous of freeing him from it.—"Why, formerly," said the grocer, "you used to call me Planchet, quite short, and you would have spoken to me then in a much more familiar manner than you do now."

"Certainly, certainly, I should have said so formerly," replied the good-natured Porthos, with an embarrassment full of delicacy; "but formerly—"—"Formerly I was M. d'Artagnan's lackey; is not that what you mean?"—"Yes."—"Well, if I am not quite his lackey, I am as much as ever his devoted servant; and more than that, since that time—"—"Well, Planchet?"—"Since that time I have had the honour of being in partnership with him."

"Oh!" said Porthos. "What! has D'Artagnan gone into the grocery business?"—"No, no," said D'Artagnan, whom these words had drawn out of his reverie, and who entered into the conversation with that readiness and quickness which distinguished every operation of his mind and body; "it was not D'Artagnan who entered into the grocery business, but Planchet who entered into a political affair with me."—"Yes," said Planchet, with mingled pride and satisfaction; "we transacted a little matter of business together which brought me in a hundred thousand livres, and M. D'Artagnan two hundred thousand."—"Oh!" said Porthos, with admiration.

"So that, Monsieur the Baron," continued the grocer, "I again beg you to be kind enough to call me Planchet, as you used to do; and to speak to me as familiarly as in old times. You cannot possibly imagine the pleasure that it would give me."—"If that be the case, my dear Planchet, I will do so, certainly," replied Porthos. And as he was quite close to Planchet, he raised his hand, as if to strike him on the shoulder, in token of friendly cordiality; but a providential movement of the horse made him miss his aim, so that his hand fell on the crupper of Planchet's horse instead,—which made the animal's legs almost give way.

D'Artagnan burst out laughing, as he said: "Take care, Planchet; for if Porthos begins to like you too much, he will caress you; and if he caresses you, he will knock you as flat as a pancake. Porthos is still very strong, you see."—"Oh," said Planchet, "Mousqueton is not dead, and yet Monsieur the Baron is very fond of him."

"Certainly," said Porthos, with a sigh which made all the three horses rear simultaneously; "and I was saying only this very morning to D'Artagnan, how much I missed him. But

tell me, Planchet? "—"Thank you, Monsieur the Baron, thank you."—"Good lad, good lad! How many acres of park have you?"—"Of park?"—"Yes; we will reckon up the meadows presently, and the woods afterwards." — "Whereabouts, Monsieur?"—"At your château."—"Oh, Monsieur the Baron, I have neither château, nor park, nor meadows, nor woods."

"What have you, then," inquired Porthos; "and why do you call it a country-seat?"—"I did not call it a country-seat, Monsieur the Baron," replied Planchet, somewhat humiliated, "but a simple country-box"—"Ah! I understand. You are modest."—"No, Monsieur the Baron; I speak the plain truth. I have rooms for a couple of friends; that is all."—"But in that case, whereabouts do your friends walk?"—"In the first place, they can walk about the king's forest, which is very beautiful." —"Yes, I know the forest is very fine," said Porthos; "nearly as beautiful as my forest at Berri."

Planchet opened his eyes very wide. "Have you a forest of the same kind as the forest at Fontainebleau, Monsieur the Baron?" he stammered.—"Yes; I have two, indeed, but the one at Berri is my favourite."—"Why so?" asked Planchet, courteously.—"Because, in the first place, I don't know where it ends; and in the second place because it is full of poachers." —"And how can this abundance of poachers make the forest so agreeable to you?"—"Because they hunt my game, and I hunt them,—which in these peaceful times is for me a picture of war on a small scale."

They had reached this turn of the conversation, when Planchet looking up perceived the first houses of Fontainebleau, the outline of which stood out strongly against the sky, while, rising above the compact and irregularly formed mass of buildings, the pointed roofs of the château were clearly visible, the slates of which glistened beneath the light of the moon, like the scales of an immense fish. "Messieurs," said Planchet, "I have the honour to inform you that we have arrived at Fontainebleau."

CHAPTER CXLIV

PLANCHET'S COUNTRY-HOUSE

THE cavaliers looked up, and saw that what the honest Planchet had announced to them was true. Ten minutes afterwards they were in the street called the Rue de Lyon, on the side opposite to the inn with the sign of the Beau-Paon. A high hedge of bushy elders, hawthorn, and wild hops formed a dark and impenetrable fence, behind which rose a white house with a large tiled roof. Two of the windows, which were quite dark, looked upon the street. Between the two a small door, with a porch supported by pillars, formed the entrance to the house. This door was gained by a step raised a little from the ground. Planchet got off his horse as if he intended to knock at the door; but on second thoughts, he took hold of his horse by the bridle, and led it about thirty paces farther on, his two companions following him. He then advanced about another thirty paces, until he arrived at the door of a cart-house, lighted by a grating; and lifting up a wooden latch, the only fastening, pushed open one of the folding doors. He entered first, leading his horse after him by the bridle into a small courtyard, where an odour met them which revealed their close vicinity to a stable. "That smells all right," said Porthos loudly, getting off his horse; "and I almost begin to think that I am near my own cows at Pierrefonds."—"I have only one cow," Planchet hastened to say modestly.—"And I have thirty," said Porthos; "or, rather, I don't exactly know how many I have."

When the two cavaliers had entered, Planchet fastened the door behind them. In the meantime D'Artagnan, who had dismounted with his usual agility, inhaled the fresh perfumed air with the delight which a Parisian feels at the sight of green fields and fresh foliage, and plucked a piece of honeysuckle with one hand and of columbine with the other. Porthos had laid hold of some peas which were twined round poles stuck into the ground, and ate, or rather browsed upon them, pods and all; and Planchet was busily engaged in trying to wake up an old and infirm peasant, who was fast asleep in a shed, lying on a bed of moss covered with an old stable-coat. The peasant, recognising Planchet, called him "the master," to the grocer's great satisfaction.—"Put the horses to the rack, old fellow, and give them good allowance," said Planchet.

"Yes, yes; fine animals they are too," said the peasant. "Oh, they shall have as much as they can eat!"—"Gently, gently, my man!" said D'Artagnan. "We are getting on a little too fast. A few oats and a truss of straw,—nothing more."—"Some bran and water for my mare," said Porthos; "for she is very warm, I think."

"Don't be afraid, Messieurs!" replied Planchet; "Daddy Célestin is an old gendarme who fought at Ivry. He knows all about stables; so come into the house." And he led the way along a well-sheltered walk, which crossed a kitchen-garden, then a small paddock, and came out into a little garden behind the house, the principal front of which, as we have already noticed, faced the street. As they approached they could see through two open windows on the ground floor, which led into a sitting-room, the interior of Planchet's residence. This room, softly lighted by a lamp placed on the table, seemed, from the end of the garden, like a smiling picture of repose, comfort, and happiness. In every direction in which the rays of light fell, whether upon a piece of old china, or upon an article of furniture shining from excessive neatness, or upon the weapons hanging against the wall, the soft light was as softly reflected; and its rays seemed to linger everywhere upon something agreeable to the eye. The lamp which lighted the room, while the foliage of jasmine and columbine hung in masses from the window-frames, dazzlingly illuminated a damask table-cloth as white as snow. The table was laid for two persons. An amber-coloured wine sparkled in the long cut-glass bottle; and a large jug of blue china, with a silver lid, was filled with foaming cider. Near the table, in a high-backed arm-chair, reclined, fast asleep, a woman of about thirty years of age, her face the very picture of health and freshness. Curled up upon her knees lay a large yellow cat, with her paws folded under her, and her eyes half closed, purring in that significant manner which, according to feline habits, indicates perfect contentment. The two friends paused before the window in complete amazement, while Planchet, perceiving their astonishment, was filled with delight.—"Ah, Planchet, you rascal!" said D'Artagnan, "I now understand your absences."

"Oh, there is some white linen!" said Porthos in his turn, in a voice of thunder. At the sound of this voice the cat took flight, the housekeeper woke up suddenly, and Planchet, assuming a gracious air, introduced his two companions into the room, where the table was already laid.

"Permit me, my dear," he said, "to present to you M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, my patron." D'Artagnan took the lady's hand in his in the most courteous manner, and with precisely the same chivalrous air with which he would have taken Madame's.

"M. le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds," added Planchet. Porthos made a reverence which Anne of Austria must have approved of, or she would indeed have been hard to please. It was then Planchet's turn; and he unhesitatingly embraced the lady in question, not, however, until he had made a sign as if requesting D'Artagnan's and Porthos's permission,—a permission which was of course frankly conceded.

D'Artagnan complimented Planchet, and said, "You are indeed a man who knows how to make life agreeable."—"Life, Monsieur," replied Planchet, laughing, "is a capital which a man ought to invest as sensibly as he possibly can."—"And you get very good interest for yours," said Porthos, with a burst of laughter like a peal of thunder.

Planchet turned to his housekeeper. "You have before you, my dear," he said to her, "the two men who have influenced no small portion of my life. I have spoken to you about them both very frequently."—"And two others as well," said the lady, with a very decided Flemish accent.

"Madame is Dutch?" inquired D'Artagnan. Porthos curled his moustache,—a circumstance which was not lost upon D'Artagnan, who remarked everything. "I am from Antwerp," replied the lady.—"And her name is Madame Gechter," said Planchet.

"You should not call her Madame," said D'Artagnan.—"Why not?" asked Planchet.—"Because it would make her seem older every time you called her so."—"Well, I call her Trüchen."—"And a very pretty name too," said Porthos.

"Trüchen," said Planchet, "came to me from Flanders, with her virtue and two thousand florins. She ran away from a brute of a husband, who was in the habit of beating her. Being myself a Picard born, I was always very fond of the Artesian women, and it is only a step from Artois to Flanders. She came crying bitterly to her godfather, my predecessor in the Rue des Lombards; she placed her two thousand florins in my establishment, which I have turned to very good account, and which bring her in ten thousand."—"Bravo, Planchet!"—"She is free and well off; she has a cow, a maid-servant, and old Daddy Célestin at her orders. She mends my linen, knits

my winter stockings, sees me only every fortnight, and is willing to consider herself happy."—"And I am very happy indeed," said Trüchen, with perfect ingenuousness.

Porthos began to curl the other side of his moustache. "The deuce!" thought D'Artagnan, "can Porthos have any intentions in that quarter?"

In the meantime, perceiving what was the most important matter in hand, Trüchen had set her cook to work, had laid the table for two more, and covered it with sumptuous fare,—such as converts a supper into a repast, and a repast into a feast,—fresh butter, salt beef, anchovies, tunny, a shopful of Planchet's commodities, fowls, vegetables, salad, fish from the pond and the river, game from the forest,—all the produce, in fact, of the province. Moreover, Planchet returned from the cellar, laden with ten bottles of wine, the glass of which could hardly be seen for the thick coating of dust which covered them. The sight of all this rejoiced Porthos's heart as he said, "I am hungry;" and he took his seat beside Dame Trüchen, whom he looked at in the most killing manner. D'Artagnan seated himself on the other side of her: while Planchet, discreet and full of delight, sat opposite.

"Do not trouble yourselves," said Planchet, "if Trüchen should leave the table now and then during supper; for she will have to look after your bedrooms." In fact, the housekeeper made her escape very frequently, and they could hear, on the first floor above them, the creaking of the wooden bedsteads and the rolling of the castors on the floor. While this was going on, the three men, Porthos especially, ate and drank gloriously; it was wonderful to see them. The ten full bottles were ten empty ones by the time Trüchen returned with the cheese. D'Artagnan still preserved his dignity and self-possession, but Porthos had lost a portion of his; the mirth soon began to be somewhat uproarious. D'Artagnan recommended a new descent into the cellar; and as Planchet did not walk with the steadiness of a well-trained foot-soldier, the captain of the musketeers proposed to accompany him. They set off, humming songs wild enough to frighten anybody who might be listening. Trüchen remained behind at table with Porthos. While the two wine-bibbers were looking behind the firewood for what they wanted, a sharp, sonorous sound was heard like the impression of a pair of lips on a cheek.

"Porthos fancies himself at La Rochelle," thought D'Artagnan, as they returned freighted with bottles. Planchet was

singing so loudly that he was incapable of noticing anything. D'Artagnan, whom nothing ever escaped, remarked how much redder Trüchen's left cheek was than her right. Porthos was sitting and smiling at Trüchen's left, and was curling with both his hands both sides of his moustache at once; and Trüchen, too, was smiling at the magnificent seigneur. The sparkling wine of Anjou very soon produced a remarkable effect upon the three companions. D'Artagnan had hardly strength enough left to take a candlestick to light Planchet up his own staircase. Planchet was pulling Porthos along, who was following Trüchen, who was herself jovial enough. It was D'Artagnan who found out the rooms and the beds. Porthos threw himself into the one destined for him, after his friend had undressed him. D'Artagnan got into his own bed, saying to himself, "*Mordioux!* I had made up my mind never to touch that light-coloured wine, which brings my early camp-days back again. Fie! fie! if my musketeers were only to see their captain in such a state!" And drawing the curtains of his bed, he added, "Fortunately enough, though, they will not see me." Planchet was taken in charge by Trüchen, who undressed him and closed doors and curtains. "The country is very amusing," said Porthos, stretching out his legs, which passed through the wooden footboard, making a tremendous noise, of which, however, no one was capable of taking the slightest notice, so much had they been amused in Planchet's country-house. By two o'clock in the morning every one was fast asleep.

CHAPTER CXLV

SHOWING WHAT COULD BE SEEN FROM PLANCHET'S HOUSE

The next morning found the three heroes sleeping soundly. Trüchen had closed the outside blinds to keep the first rays of the sun from the heavy eyes of her guests, like a kind, good woman. It was still perfectly dark, then, beneath Porthos's curtains and under Planchet's canopy, when D'Artagnan, awakened by an indiscreet ray of light which made its way through the windows, jumped hastily out of bed, as if he wished to be the first at the assault. He took by assault Porthos's room, which was next to his own. The worthy Porthos was sleeping with a noise like distant thunder; in the dim obscurity

of the room his gigantic frame was prominently displayed, and his swollen fist hung down outside the bed upon the carpet. D'Artagnan awoke Porthos, who rubbed his eyes in a tolerably good humour. In the meantime Planchet was dressing himself, and came to meet at their bedroom doors his two guests, who were still somewhat unsteady from their previous evening's entertainment.

Although it was yet very early, the whole household was already up. The cook was mercilessly slaughtering in the poultry-yard, and Daddy Célestin was gathering cherries in the garden. Porthos, brisk and lively as ever, held out his hand to Planchet, and D'Artagnan requested permission to embrace Madame Trüchen. The latter, who cherished no ill-will towards the vanquished, approached Porthos, upon whom she conferred the same favour. Porthos embraced Madame Trüchen, heaving an enormous sigh. Planchet took both his friends by the hand. "I am going to show you over the house," he said. "When we arrived last evening it was as dark as an oven, and we were unable to see anything; but in broad daylight everything looks different, and you will be satisfied, I hope."

"If we begin by the view you have," said D'Artagnan, "that charms me beyond everything. I have always lived in royal mansions, you know! and princes have some very good ideas upon the selection of points of view."—"I am a great stickler for a good view myself," said Porthos. "At my château de Pierrefonds I have had four avenues laid out, and at the end of each is a landscape of a character altogether different from the others."—"You shall see my prospect," said Planchet; and he led his two guests to a window.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "this is the Rue de Lyon."—"Yes, I have two windows on this side,—a paltry, insignificant view, for there is always that bustling and noisy inn, which is a very disagreeable neighbour. I had four windows here, but I have kept only two."—"Let us go on," said D'Artagnan.

They entered a corridor leading to the bedrooms, and Planchet pushed open the outside blinds. "Holloa! what is that out yonder?" said Porthos.—"The forest," said Planchet. "It is the horizon,—always a thick line, which is yellow in the spring, green in the summer, red in the autumn, and white in the winter."—"All very well; but it is like a curtain, which prevents one from seeing a greater distance."

"Yes," said Planchet; "still, one can see, at all events, everything between."—"Ah, the open country!" said Porthos.

"But what is that I see out there,—crosses and stones?"—"Ah, that is the cemetery," exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Precisely," said Planchet; "I assure you it is very curious. Hardly a day passes in which some one is not buried there; for Fontainebleau is by no means an inconsiderable place. Sometimes we see young girls clothed in white carrying banners; at others, some of the town council, or rich citizens, with choristers and all the parish authorities; and then, too, we see some of the officers of the king's household."—"I should not like that," said Porthos.—"There is not indeed much amusement in it," said D'Artagnan.—"I assure you it encourages religious thoughts," replied Planchet.

"Oh, I don't deny that!"—"But," continued Planchet, "we must all die one day or another; and I once met with a maxim somewhere which I have remembered, that the thought of death is a thought that will do us all good."—"I am far from saying the contrary," said Porthos.—"But," objected D'Artagnan, "the thought of green fields, flowers, rivers, blue horizons, extensive and boundless plains, is no less likely to do us good."—"If I had any, I should be far from rejecting them," said Planchet; "but possessing only this little cemetery, full of flowers, so moss-grown, shady, and quiet, I am contented with it, and I think of those who live in town, in the Rue des Lombards for instance, and who have to listen every day to the rumbling of two thousand vehicles and to the trampling of a hundred and fifty thousand foot-passengers in the mud."

"But living," said Porthos, "living; remember that."—"That is exactly the reason," said Planchet, timidly, "why I feel that it does me good to see a few of the dead."—"Upon my word," said D'Artagnan, "that fellow Planchet was born to be a poet as well as a grocer."—"Monsieur," said Planchet, "I am one of those good-humoured men whom Heaven has created to live a certain space of time, and to consider all things good which they meet with during their stay on earth."

D'Artagnan sat down close to the window; and as there seemed to be something substantial in Planchet's philosophy, he mused over it.

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos, "if I am not mistaken, we are going to have a representation now, for I think I heard something like chanting."—"Yes," said D'Artagnan; "I hear singing too."—"Oh, it is only a burial of a very poor description," said Planchet, disdainfully; "the officiating priest, the beadle, and only one chorister boy, nothing more. You observe,

Messieurs, that the defunct lady or gentleman could not have been of very high rank."—"No; no one seems to be following the coffin."—"Yes," said Porthos; "I see a man."—"You are right; a man wrapped up in a cloak," said D'Artagnan.—"It's not worth looking at," said Planchet.—"I find it interesting," said D'Artagnan, earnestly, leaning on the window.

"Come, come, you are beginning to take a fancy to the place already," said Planchet, delightedly. "It is exactly my own case. I was so melancholy at first that I could do nothing but make the sign of the cross all day, and the chants were like nails being driven into my head; but now the chants lull me to sleep, and no bird I have ever seen or heard can sing better than those which are to be met with in this cemetery."—"Well," said Porthos, "this is beginning to get a little dull for me, and I prefer going downstairs."

Planchet with one bound was beside his guest, to whom he offered his hand to lead him into the garden.—"What!" said Porthos to D'Artagnan, as he turned round, "are you going to remain here?"—"Yes, my friend; I shall join you presently."—"Well, M. d'Artagnan is right, after all," said Planchet; "are they beginning to bury yet?"—"Not yet."—"Ah! yes, the grave-digger is waiting until the cords are fastened round the bier. But see! a woman has just entered the cemetery at the other end."—"Yes, yes, my dear Planchet," said D'Artagnan, quickly; "but leave me, leave me. I feel that I am beginning already to be much comforted by my meditations; so do not interrupt me."

Planchet left; and D'Artagnan remained, devouring with his eager gaze from behind the half-closed blinds what was taking place just before him. The two bearers of the corpse had unfastened the straps of the litter, and were letting their burden descend gently into the open grave. A few paces distant, the man with the cloak wrapped round him, the only spectator of this melancholy scene, was leaning with his back against a large cypress-tree, and kept his face and person entirely concealed from the grave-diggers and the priests. The corpse was buried in five minutes. The grave having been filled up, the priests turned away; and the grave-digger, having addressed a few words to them, followed them as they moved away. The man in the cloak bowed as they passed him, and put a piece of money into the grave-digger's hand. "*Mordioux!*" murmured D'Artagnan; "why, that man is Aramis himself."

Aramis, in fact, remained alone, on that side at least; for

hardly had he turned his head when a woman's footsteps and the rustling of her dress were heard in the path close to him. He immediately turned round, and took off his hat with the most ceremonious respect; he led the lady under the shelter of some walnut and lime trees which overshadowed a magnificent tomb.—"Ah! who would have thought it?" said D'Artagnan; "the Bishop of Vannes at a rendezvous! He is still the same Abbé Aramis as when he played the gallant at Noisy-le-Sec. Yes," added the musketeer; "but as it is in a cemetery the rendezvous is sacred;" and he began to laugh.

The conversation lasted for fully half an hour. D'Artagnan could not see the lady's face, for she kept her back turned towards him; but he saw perfectly well, by the erect attitude of both the speakers, by their gestures, by the measured and careful manner with which they glanced at each other, either by way of attack or defence, that they must be conversing about any other subject than that of love. At the end of the conversation the lady rose, and bowed most profoundly to Aramis. "Oh!" said D'Artagnan; "this rendezvous finishes like one of a very tender nature, though. The cavalier kneels at the beginning, the young lady by and by gets tamed down, and then it is she who has to supplicate. Who is this girl? I would give anything to ascertain."

This seemed impossible, however, for Aramis was the first to leave; the lady carefully concealed her head and face, and then immediately departed. D'Artagnan could hold out no longer. He ran to the window which looked out on the Rue de Lyon, and saw Aramis just entering the inn. The lady was proceeding in quite an opposite direction, and seemed, in fact, to be about to rejoin an equipage, consisting of two led horses and a carriage, which he could see standing close to the borders of the forest. She was walking slowly, her head bent down, absorbed in the deepest meditation.

"*Mordioux! mordioux!* I must and will learn who that woman is," said the musketeer again; and then, without further deliberation, he set off in pursuit of her. As he was going along he tried to think how he could possibly contrive to make her raise her veil. "She is not young," he said, "and is a woman of high rank in society. I ought to know that figure and carriage." As he ran, the sound of his spurs and of his boots upon the hard ground of the street made a strange jingling noise,—a fortunate circumstance in itself, which he had not reckoned upon. The noise disturbed the lady; she seemed to

fancy that she was being either followed or pursued, which was indeed the case, and turned round. D'Artagnan started as if he had received a charge of small shot in his legs, and then turning suddenly round, as if he were going back the same way he had come, murmured, "Madame de Chevreuse!" D'Artagnan would not go home until he had learned everything. He asked Daddy Célestin to inquire of the grave-digger whose body it was they had buried that morning. "A poor Franciscan mendicant friar," replied the latter, "who had not even a dog to love him in this world and to accompany him to his last resting-place."—"If that were really the case," thought D'Artagnan, "Aramis would not have been present at his funeral. The Bishop of Vannes is not precisely a dog so far as devotion goes; his scent, however, is quite as keen, I admit."

CHAPTER CXLVI

HOW PORTHOS, TRÜCHEN, AND PLANCHET PARTED WITH ONE ANOTHER ON FRIENDLY TERMS, THANKS TO D'ARTAGNAN

THERE was good living in Planchet's house. Porthos broke a ladder and two cherry-trees, stripped the raspberry-bushes, and was only unable to succeed in reaching the strawberry-beds on account, as he said, of his belt. Trüchen, who had got quite sociable with the giant, said that it was not the belt so much as the fear of bursting it; and Porthos, in a state of highest delight, embraced Trüchen, who gathered him a handful of the strawberries and made him eat them out of her hand. D'Artagnan, who came up in the meantime, scolded Porthos for his indolence, and silently pitied Planchet. Porthos breakfasted with a very good appetite; and when he had finished he said, looking at Trüchen, "I could make myself very happy here." Trüchen smiled at his remark; and so did Planchet, but the latter not without some embarrassment.

D'Artagnan then addressed Porthos: "You must not, my friend, let the delights of Capua make you forget the real object of our journey to Fontainebleau."—"My presentation to the king?"—"Certainly. I am going to take a turn in the town to get everything ready for that. Do not think of leaving the house, I beg."—"Oh, no!" exclaimed Porthos.

Planchet looked at D'Artagnan nervously. "Will you be away long?" he inquired.—"No, my friend; and this very

evening I will release you from two troublesome guests."—"Oh! M. d'Artagnan! can you say—"—"No, no! you are an excellent-hearted fellow, but your home is very small. Such a house, with only a couple of acres of land, would be fit for a king, and make him very happy too. But you were not born a great lord."—"No more was M. Porthos," murmured Planchet.

"But he has become so, my good fellow; his income has been a hundred thousand livres a year for the last twenty years, and for the last fifty years he has been the owner of a couple of fists and a backbone which have never found their match throughout the whole realm of France. Porthos is a man of the very greatest consequence compared to you, my son; and—well, I need say no more, for I know you are an intelligent fellow."—"No, no, Monsieur; explain what you mean."—"Look at your orchard stripped, your larder empty, your bedstead broken, your cellar almost exhausted; look too—at Madame Trüchen—"—"Oh, good gracious!" said Planchet.

"Porthos, you see, is lord of thirty villages, each containing three hundred lively vassals; and he is a very handsome man that Porthos!"—"Oh, good gracious!" repeated Planchet.—"Madame Trüchen is an excellent person," continued D'Artagnan; "but keep her for yourself, do you understand?" and he slapped him on the shoulder.

Planchet at this moment perceived Porthos and Trüchen sitting close together in an arbour. Trüchen, with a grace of manner peculiarly Flemish, was making a pair of ear-rings for Porthos out of double cherries, while Porthos was laughing as amorously as Samson did with Delilah. Planchet pressed D'Artagnan's hand, and ran towards the arbour. We must do Porthos the justice to say that he did not move as they approached, and very likely he did not think that he was doing any harm. Nor indeed did Trüchen move, either, which rather put Planchet out; but he had been so accustomed to see fashionable people in his shop, that he found no difficulty in putting a good countenance on what was disagreeable to him. Planchet seized Porthos by the arm, and proposed to go and look at the horses, but Porthos said he was tired. Planchet then suggested that the Baron du Vallon should taste some cordial of his own manufacture, which was not to be equalled anywhere,—an offer which the baron immediately accepted; and in this way Planchet managed to engage his enemy's attention during the whole of the day, by dint of sacrificing his cellar in preference to his *amour propre*. Two hours afterwards D'Artagnan returned

'Everything is arranged," he said; "I saw his Majesty at the very moment he was setting off for the chase. The king expects us this evening."

"The king expects me!" cried Porthos, drawing himself up. It is a sad thing to have to confess, but a man's heart is like a restless pillow; for from that very moment Porthos ceased to look at Madame Trüchen in that touching manner which had so softened the heart of the lady from Antwerp. Planchet encouraged these ambitious leanings in the best way he could. He related, or rather reviewed, all the splendours of the last reign,—its battles, sieges, and grand court ceremonies. He spoke of the luxurious display which the English made, and of the prizes which the three brave companions had won, and told how D'Artagnan, who at the beginning had been the humblest of the three, had become their chief. He fired Porthos with a generous feeling of enthusiasm, by reminding him of his early youth now passed away; he enlarged, according to his ability, on the chastity of some great lord, and his religious respect for the obligations of friendship; he was eloquent, and skilful in his choice of subjects. He delighted Porthos, frightened Trüchen, and made D'Artagnan think.

At six o'clock the musketeer ordered the horses to be brought round, and told Porthos to get ready. He thanked Planchet for his kind hospitality, whispered a few vague words about a post he might succeed in obtaining for him at court, which immediately raised Planchet in Trüchen's estimation, in which the poor grocer—so good, so generous, so devoted—had become much lowered ever since the appearance and comparison with him of the two great gentlemen. Such, however, is woman's nature; she is ambitious to possess what she has not yet obtained and disdains it as soon as it is acquired.

After having rendered this service to his friend Planchet, D'Artagnan said in a low tone to Porthos, "That is a very beautiful ring you have on your finger."—"It is worth three hundred pistoles," said Porthos.—"Madame Trüchen will remember you better if you leave her that ring," replied D'Artagnan,—a suggestion which Porthos seemed to hesitate to adopt.

"You think it is not beautiful enough, perhaps," said the musketeer. "I understand your feelings. A great lord like you would not think of accepting the hospitality of an old servant without paying him most handsomely for it; but I am sure that Planchet is too good-hearted a fellow to remember that

you have an income of a hundred thousand livres a year."—"I have more than half a mind," said Porthos, flattered by the remark, "to make Madame Trüchen a present of my little farm at Bracieux; that would be a finger-ring for her,—twelve acres."—"It is too much, my good Porthos, too much just at present. Keep it for a future occasion." He then took the ring off Porthos's finger, and approaching Trüchen said to her: "Madame, Monsieur the Baron hardly knows how to entreat you, out of regard for him, to accept this little ring. M. du Vallon is one of the most generous and discreet men of my acquaintance. He wished to offer you a farm that he has at Bracieux, but I dissuaded him from it."

"Oh!" said Trüchen, looking eagerly at the diamond.—"Monsieur the Baron!" exclaimed Planchet, quite overcome.—"My good friend!" stammered out Porthos, delighted at having been so well represented by D'Artagnan. These several exclamations, uttered at the same moment, made quite a pathetic winding-up of a day which might have terminated grotesquely. But D'Artagnan was there, and on every occasion in which he had exercised any control, matters had ended in the way he desired. There were general embracings; Trüchen, whom the baron's munificence had restored to her proper position, very timidly, and blushing all the while, presented simply her forehead to the great lord with whom she had been on such very excellent terms the evening before. Planchet himself was overcome by a feeling of the deepest humility. In the same generous vein Porthos would have emptied his pockets into the hands of the cook and of Célestin; but D'Artagnan stopped him. "No," he said; "it is now my turn." And he gave one pistole to the woman and two to the man; and the benedictions which were showered down upon them would have rejoiced the heart of Harpagon himself, and have rendered even him prodigal of his money.

D'Artagnan made Planchet lead them to the château, and introduced Porthos into his own apartment, where he arrived safely without having been perceived by those whom he wished to avoid.

CHAPTER CXLVII

THE PRESENTATION OF PORTHOS

At seven o'clock the same evening, the king gave an audience to an ambassador from the United Provinces, in the grand reception-room. The audience lasted a quarter of an hour. After this his Majesty received those who had been recently presented, together with a few ladies, who paid their respects first. In one corner of the room, concealed behind a column, Porthos and D'Artagnan were conversing together, waiting until their turn should come. "Have you heard the news?" inquired the musketeer of his friend.—"No!"—"Well, look then!" Porthos raised himself on tiptoe, and saw M. Fouquet in full court dress, leading Aramis towards the king. "Aramis!" said Porthos.

"Presented to the king by M. Fouquet."—"Ah!" ejaculated Porthos.—"For having fortified Belle-Isle," continued D'Artagnan.—"And I?"—"You—ah! you, as I have already had the honour of telling you, are the good-natured, kind-hearted Porthos; and so they begged you to take care of St. Mandé a little while."—"Ah!" repeated Porthos.—"But, very happily, I was there," said D'Artagnan, "and presently it will be my turn."

At this moment Fouquet addressed the king. "Sire," he said, "I have a favour to solicit of your Majesty. M. d'Herblay is not ambitious, but he knows he can be of some service. Your Majesty needs a representative at Rome, who should be able to exercise a powerful influence there; may I request a cardinal's hat for M. d'Herblay?" The king started. "I do not often solicit anything of your Majesty," said Fouquet.—"That is a reason, certainly," replied the king, who always expressed any hesitation which he might have in that manner, and to which remark there was nothing to be said in reply.

Fouquet and Aramis looked at each other. The king resumed: "M. d'Herblay can serve us equally well in France,—an archbishopric, for instance."—"Sire," objected Fouquet, with a grace of manner peculiarly his own, "your Majesty overwhelms M. d'Herblay. The archbishopric may, in your Majesty's extreme kindness, be conferred in addition to the hat; the one does not exclude the other."

The king admired the readiness which Fouquet displayed, and smiled, saying, "D'Artagnan himself could not have answered better." The king had no sooner pronounced the name, than D'Artagnan appeared. "Did your Majesty call me?" he said.

Aramis and Fouquet drew back a step, as if they were about to retire. "Permit me, Sire," said D'Artagnan, quickly, as he led forward Porthos,—"permit me to present to your Majesty M. le Baron du Vallon, one of the bravest gentlemen of France." Aramis, at the sight of Porthos, turned as pale as death, while Fouquet clinched his hands under his ruffles. D'Artagnan smiled at both of them; while Porthos bowed, visibly overcome before the royal presence. "Porthos here?" murmured Fouquet in Aramis's ear.—"Hush! there is some treachery at work," said the latter.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "more than six years ago I ought to have presented M. du Vallon to your Majesty; but certain men resemble stars, they move not unless their friends accompany them. The Pleiades are never disunited; and that is the reason I have selected, for the purpose of presenting M. du Vallon to you, the very moment when you would see M. d'Herblay by his side."

Aramis almost lost countenance. He looked at D'Artagnan with a proud, haughty air, as though to accept the defiance which the latter seemed to throw down. "Ah! these gentlemen are good friends, then?" said the king.—"Excellent friends, Sire; the one can answer for the other. Ask M. de Vannes how Belle-Isle was fortified."

Fouquet moved back a step. "Belle-Isle," said Aramis, coldly, "was fortified by that gentleman;" and he indicated Porthos with his hand, who bowed a second time. Louis could not withhold his admiration, though at the same time his suspicions were aroused. "Yes," said D'Artagnan; "but ask Monsieur the Baron who aided him in his labours."—"Aramis," said Porthos, frankly; and he indicated the bishop.

"What the deuce does all this mean," thought the bishop, "and what sort of a termination are we to expect to this comedy?"—"What!" exclaimed the king, "is Monsieur the Cardinal—I mean, Monsieur the Bishop—called Aramis?"—"A *nom de guerre*," said D'Artagnan.—"A name of friendship," said Aramis.

"A truce to modesty!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Beneath

the priest's robe, Sire, is concealed the most brilliant officer, the bravest gentleman, and the wisest theologian in your kingdom." Louis raised his head. "And an engineer," he said, admiring Aramis's noble countenance and calm self-possession.—"An engineer for a particular purpose, Sire," said the latter.

"My companion in the musketeers, Sire," said D'Artagnan, with great warmth of manner; "the man who has more than a hundred times aided your father's ministers by his advice,—M. d'Herblay, in a word, who with M. du Vallon, myself, and M. le Comte de la Fère, who is known to your Majesty, formed that quartette which was a good deal talked about during the late king's reign and during your Majesty's minority."—"And who has fortified Belle-Isle?" the king repeated in a significant tone. Aramis advanced and said, "In order to serve the son as I have served the father."

D'Artagnan looked at Aramis most narrowly while he uttered these words, which displayed so much true respect, so much warm devotion, such entire frankness and sincerity, that even he, D'Artagnan, the eternal doubter, almost infallible in his judgment, was deceived by it. "A man who lies cannot speak in such a tone as that," he said. Louis was overcome by it. "In that case," he said to Fouquet, who anxiously awaited the result of this ordeal, "the cardinal's hat is granted. M. d'Herblay, I pledge you my honour that the first promotion shall be yours. Thank M. Fouquet for it."

These words were overheard by Colbert; they stung him to the quick, and he left the salon abruptly. "And you, M. du Vallon," said the king, "what have you to ask? I am pleased to have it in my power to acknowledge the services of those who were faithful to my father."

"Sire," began Porthos; but he was unable to proceed further. —"Sire," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this worthy gentleman is overpowered by your Majesty's presence,—he who has so valiantly sustained the looks and the fire of a thousand foes. But knowing what his thoughts are, I—who am more accustomed to gaze upon the sun—can translate them; he needs nothing, he desires nothing but to have the happiness of gazing upon your Majesty for a quarter of an hour."—"You shall sup with me this evening," said the king, saluting Porthos with a gracious smile.

Porthos became crimson from delight and pride. The king dismissed him; and D'Artagnan pushed him out into the hall,

after he had embraced him warmly. "Sit next to me at table," said Porthos in his ear.

"Yes, my friend."—"Aramis is annoyed with me, I think."—"Aramis has never liked you so much as he does now. Fancy! it was I who was just now the means of his getting the cardinal's hat."—"Of course," said Porthos. "By the by, does the king like to have his guests eat much at his table?"—"It is a compliment to himself if you do," said D'Artagnan, "for he possesses a royal appetite."—"You gratify me exceedingly," said Porthos.

CHAPTER CXLVIII

EXPLANATIONS

Aramis had cleverly managed to effect a diversion for the purpose of finding D'Artagnan and Porthos. He came up to the latter, behind one of the columns, and as he pressed his hand, said, "So you have escaped from my prison?"—"Do not scold him," said D'Artagnan; "it was I, dear Aramis, who set him free."—"Ah! my friend," replied Aramis, looking at Porthos, "could you not have waited with a little more patience?"

D'Artagnan came to the assistance of Porthos, who already began to breathe hard in perplexity. "You see," said he to Aramis, "you members of the church are great politicians; we, mere soldiers, go at once to the point. The facts are these. I went to pay my dear Baisemeaux a visit—" Aramis pricked up his ears. "Stay!" said Porthos; "you remind me that I have a letter from Baisemeaux for you, Aramis;" and Porthos held out to the bishop the letter which we have already seen. Aramis begged to be allowed to read it, and read it without D'Artagnan's feeling in the slightest degree embarrassed by the circumstance that he was so well acquainted with the contents of it. Besides, Aramis's face was so impenetrable that D'Artagnan could not but admire him more than ever; after he had read it, he put the letter into his pocket with the calmest possible air.

"You were saying, Captain?" he observed.—"I was saying," continued the musketeer, "that I had gone to pay Baisemeaux a visit on his Majesty's service."—"On his Majesty's service?" said Aramis.

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "and, naturally enough, we talked about you and our friends. I must say that Baisemeaux received me coldly; so I soon took my leave of him. As I was returning, a soldier accosted me, and said (no doubt he recognised me, notwithstanding I was in citizen's dress), 'Captain, will you be good enough to read me the name written on this envelope?' and I read, 'To M. du Vallon, at M. Fouquet's, St. Mandé.' 'The deuce,' said I to myself, 'Porthos has not returned, then, as I fancied, to Belle-Isle or Pierrefonds, but is at M. Fouquet's house, at St. Mandé; and as M. Fouquet is not at St. Mandé, Porthos must be quite alone, or, at all events, with Aramis; I will go and see Porthos.' And I accordingly went to see Porthos."—"Very good," said Aramis, thoughtfully.—"You never told me that," said Porthos.—"I did not have the time, my friend."

"And you brought back Porthos with you here to Fontainebleau?"—"Yes, to Planchet's house."—"Does Planchet live at Fontainebleau?" inquired Aramis.—"Yes, near the cemetery," said Porthos, thoughtlessly.

"What do you mean by 'near the cemetery'?" said Aramis, suspiciously.—"Come," thought the musketeer, "since there is to be a squabble, let us take advantage of it."—"Yes; the cemetery," said Porthos. "Planchet certainly is a very excellent fellow, who makes very excellent preserves; but his house has windows which look out upon the cemetery, and a very melancholy prospect it is. So this morning—"

"This morning?" said Aramis, more and more excited. D'Artagnan turned his back to them, and walked to the window, where he began to drum a march upon one of the panes of glass. "Yes, this morning," Porthos went on, "we saw a man buried there."—"Ah!"—"Very depressing, was it not? I should never be able to live in a house from which burials can always be seen. D'Artagnan, on the contrary, seems to like it very much."—"So D'Artagnan saw it as well?"—"He not only saw it; he literally never took his eyes from it the whole time."

Aramis started, and turned to look at the musketeer; but the latter was already engaged in earnest conversation with De Saint-Aignan. Aramis continued to question Porthos; and when he had squeezed all the juice out of this enormous lemon, he threw the peel aside. He turned towards his friend D'Artagnan, and clapping him on the shoulder, when De Saint-Aignan had left him, the king's supper having been announced, said, "My friend."—"Yes, my dear fellow," replied D'Artagnan.

"We do not sup with his Majesty, I believe?"—"Yes, indeed, I do."—"Can you give me ten minutes' conversation?"—"Twenty, if you like. His Majesty will take quite that time to get properly seated at table."—"Where shall we talk, then?"—"Here, upon these seats, if you like. The king has left; we can sit down, and the hall is empty."—"Let us sit down then."

They sat down, and Aramis took one of D'Artagnan's hands in his. "Tell me candidly, my dear friend," said he, "whether you have not induced Porthos to distrust me a little."—"I admit that I have, but not as you understand it. I saw that Porthos was bored to death, and I wished, by presenting him to the king, to do for him and for you what you would never do for yourself."—"What is that?"—"Speak in your own praise."

"And you have done it most nobly. I thank you."—"And I brought the cardinal's hat a little nearer, just as it seemed to be retreating from you."—"Ah, I admit that," said Aramis, with a singular smile; "you are, indeed, not to be matched for making your friends' fortunes for them."—"You see, then, that I acted only with the view of making Porthos's fortune for him."—"Oh, I meant to have done that myself; but your arm reaches farther than ours."

It was now D'Artagnan's turn to smile. "Come," said Aramis, "we ought to deal truthfully with each other; do you still love me, my dear D'Artagnan?"—"The same as I used to do," replied D'Artagnan, without committing himself too much by this reply.

"In that case, thanks; and now, for the most perfect frankness," said Aramis. "You came to Belle-Isle for the king."—"*Pardieu!*"—"You wished, then, to deprive us of the pleasure of offering Belle-Isle completely fortified to the king."—"But, my friend, before I could deprive you of that pleasure, I ought to have been made acquainted with your intention of doing so."

"You came to Belle-Isle without knowing anything?"—"Of you? yes. How the devil could I imagine that Aramis had become so clever an engineer as to be able to fortify like Polybius or Archimedes?"—"True. And yet you detected me yonder?"—"Oh, yes!"—"And Porthos too?"—"My dear fellow, I did not discover that Aramis was an engineer. I was only able to discover that Porthos might have become one. There is a Latin saying, 'One becomes an orator, one is born a poet;

but it has never been said, 'One is born Porthos, and one becomes an engineer.'"

"Your wit is always amusing," said Aramis, coldly. "Well, then, I will go on."—"Do so."—"When you found out our secret, you made all the haste you could to communicate it to the king."—"I certainly made as much haste as I could, my good friend, since I saw that you were making still more. When a man weighing two hundred and fifty-eight pounds, as Porthos does, rides post; when a gouty prelate—I beg your pardon, but you told me you were so—when a prelate scours along the road,—I naturally suppose that my two friends, who did not wish to be communicative with me, had certain matters of the highest importance to conceal from me, and so I made as much haste as my leanness and the absence of gout would allow."

"Did it not occur to you, my dear friend, that you might be rendering Porthos and myself a very sad service?"—"Yes, I thought it not unlikely; but you and Porthos made me play a very ridiculous part at Belle-Isle."—"Forgive me," said Aramis.—"Excuse me," said D'Artagnan.

"So that," pursued Aramis, "you now know everything?"—"No, indeed."—"You know that I was obliged to inform M. Fouquet at once of what had happened, in order that he might anticipate what you might have to tell the king?"—"That is rather obscure."

"Not at all; M. Fouquet has his enemies,—you will admit that, I suppose."—"Oh, yes,"—"And one in particular."—"A dangerous one?"—"A mortal enemy. Well, in order to counteract that enemy's influence, it was necessary that M. Fouquet should give the king a proof of a great devotion to him and of his readiness to make the greatest sacrifices. He surprised his Majesty by offering him Belle-Isle. If you had been the first to reach Paris, the surprise would have been destroyed; it would have looked as if we had yielded to fear."

"I understand."—"That is the whole mystery," said Aramis, satisfied that he had quite convinced the musketeer.—"Only," said the latter, "it would have been more simple to have taken me aside at Belle-Isle, and said to me, 'My dear D'Artagnan, we are fortifying Belle-Isle-en-Mer in order to offer it to the king. Render us the service of telling us for whom you are acting. Are you a friend of M. Colbert or of M. Fouquet?' Perhaps I should not have answered you, but you would have added, 'Are you my friend?' I should have said, 'Yes.'" Aramis hung his head. "In this way," continued D'Artagnan,

"you would have paralysed my movements, and I should have gone to the king and said, 'Sire, M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle, and exceedingly well too; but here is a note which the governor of Belle-Isle gave me for your Majesty;' or, 'M. Fouquet is about to wait upon your Majesty to explain his intentions with regard to it.' I should not have been placed in an absurd position; you would have enjoyed your surprise, and we should not have had any occasion to look askance at each other when we met."

"While, on the contrary," replied Aramis, "you have acted altogether as one friendly to M. Colbert; and you really are a friend of his, I suppose?"—"Certainly not, indeed!" exclaimed the captain. "M. Colbert is a mean fellow, and I hate him as I used to hate Mazarin, but without fearing him."—"Well, then," said Aramis, "I love M. Fouquet, and his interests are mine. You know my position. I have no property or means whatever. M. Fouquet gave me several livings, a bishopric as well; M. Fouquet has served and obliged me like the generous-hearted man he is, and I know the world sufficiently well to appreciate a kindness when I meet with it. M. Fouquet has won my regard, and I have devoted myself to his service."—"You couldn't do better; you will find him a very good master."

Aramis bit his lips, and then said, "The best, I think, a man could possibly have." He then paused for a minute, D'Artagnan taking good care not to interrupt him. "I suppose you know how Porthos got mixed up in all this?"—"No," said D'Artagnan. "I am curious, of course; but I never question a friend when he wishes to keep his real secret from me."—"Well, then, I will tell you."—"It is hardly worth the trouble if the confidence is to bind me in any way."—"Oh, fear nothing! There is no man whom I love better than Porthos, because he is so simple-minded and good. Porthos is so straightforward in everything. Since I have become a bishop I have looked for those simple natures which make me love truth and hate intrigue." D'Artagnan stroked his moustache.

"I saw Porthos, and again cultivated his acquaintance; his own time hanging idly on his hands, his presence recalled my earlier and better days,—not, however, that I am so very wicked at present. I sent for Porthos to come to Vannes. M. Fouquet, whose regard for me is very great, having learned that Porthos and I were attached to each other, promised him increase of rank at the earliest promotion; and that is the whole secret."—"I shall not abuse your confidence," said D'Artagnan.—"I

am sure of that, my dear friend; no one has a finer sense of honour than yourself."—"I flatter myself that you are right, Aramis."

"And now,"—and here the prelate looked searchingly and scrutinisingly at his friend,—"now let us talk of ourselves and for ourselves. Will you become one of M. Fouquet's friends? Do not interrupt me until you know what that means."—"Well, I am listening."—"Will you become a marshal of France, peer, duke, and the possessor of a duchy, with a million of revenue?"

"But, my friend," replied D'Artagnan, "what must one do to get all that?"—"Belong to M. Fouquet."—"But I already belong to the king, my dear friend."—"Not exclusively, I suppose?"—"Oh! D'Artagnan cannot be divided."

"You have, I presume, ambitions, as noble hearts like yours have?"—"Yes, certainly I have."—"Well?"—"Well, I wish to be a marshal of France; the king will make me marshal, duke, peer,—the king will give me all that." Aramis fixed his clear and searching gaze upon D'Artagnan. "Is not the king master?" said D'Artagnan.

"No one disputes it; but Louis XIII. was master also."—"Oh! but my dear friend, between Richelieu and Louis XIII. there was no M. d'Artagnan," said the musketeer, very quietly. —"There are many stumbling-blocks round the king," said Aramis.—"Not for the king."—"Very likely not; still—"

"One moment, Aramis. I observe that every one thinks of himself and never of this poor young prince; I will maintain myself in maintaining him."—"And if you meet with ingratitude?"—"The weak alone are afraid of that."—"You are quite certain of yourself?"—"I think so."—"Still, the king may have no further need of you?"—"On the contrary, I think his need of me will be greater than ever; and hearken, my dear fellow, if it became necessary to arrest a new Condé, what would do it? This—this alone in all France!" and D'Artagnan struck his sword.

"You are right," said Aramis, turning very pale; and then he rose and pressed D'Artagnan's hand. "There is the last summons for supper," said the captain of the musketeers; "will you excuse me?" Aramis threw his arm round the musketeer's neck, and said, "A friend like you is the brightest jewel in the royal crown." Then they separated.

"I was right," thought D'Artagnan; "there is something on foot."—"We must make haste to fire the train," said Aramis, "for D'Artagnan has discovered the match."

CHAPTER CXLIX

MADAME AND DE GUICHE

It will not be forgotten that the Comte de Guiche had left the room on the day when Louis XIV. had offered to La Vallière with so much generosity the beautiful bracelet he had won at the lottery. The count walked to and fro for some time outside the palace in the greatest distress, from a thousand suspicions and anxieties with which his mind was beset. Presently he stopped and waited on the terrace opposite the grove of trees, watching for Madame's departure. More than half an hour passed away; and as he was at that moment quite alone, the count could hardly have had any very diverting ideas at his command. He drew his tablets from his pocket, and after much hesitation determined to write these words:

"Madame,—I implore you to grant me one moment's conversation. Do not be alarmed at this request, which contains nothing in any way opposed to the profound respect with which I subscribe myself," etc.

He had signed and folded this singular supplication, when he observed many ladies leaving the château, and then several men,—in fact, almost every person who had formed the queen's circle. He saw La Vallière herself, then Montalais talking with Malicorne; he saw the departure of the very last of the numerous guests who had a short time before thronged the queen-mother's boudoir.

Madame herself had not passed. She would be obliged, however, to cross the courtyard in order to enter her own apartments; and from the terrace De Guiche could see all that was passing in the courtyard. At last he saw Madame leave attended by two pages, who were carrying torches before her. She was walking very quickly; and as soon as she reached the door, she said, "Pages, let some one go and inquire after M. le Comte de Guiche; he has to render me an account of a commission he had to execute for me. If he should be disengaged, request him to be good enough to come to my apartment."

De Guiche remained silent and concealed in the shade; but as soon as Madame had withdrawn, he darted from the terrace down the steps, and assumed a most indifferent air, so that the

pages who were hurrying towards his rooms might meet him. "Ah, Madame is seeking me!" he said to himself, quite overcome; and he crushed in his hand the letter which had now become useless.

"Monsieur the Count," said one of the pages, perceiving him, "we are indeed most fortunate in meeting you."—"Why so, Messieurs?"—"A command from Madame."—"From Madame?" said De Guiche, looking surprised.—"Yes, Monsieur the Count, her royal highness has been asking for you; you are to render account, she told us, of a commission you had to execute for her. Are you at liberty?"—"I am quite at her royal highness's orders."—"Will you have the goodness to follow us, then?"

When De Guiche ascended to the princess's apartments, he found her pale and agitated. Montalais was standing at the door, apparently in some degree uneasy about what was passing in her mistress's mind. As De Guiche appeared, "Ah! is that you, M. de Guiche?" said Madame; "pray come in. Mademoiselle de Montalais, I do not require your attendance any longer." Montalais, more puzzled than ever, courtesied and withdrew; and De Guiche and the princess were left alone. The count had every advantage in his favour; it was Madame who had summoned him to a rendezvous. But how was it possible for him to make use of this advantage? Madame was so whimsical, and her disposition was so changeable. She soon allowed this to be perceived, for, suddenly opening the conversation, she said, "Well! have you nothing to say to me?"

He imagined that she must have guessed his thoughts; he fancied,—for those who are in love are so constituted; they are as credulous and blind as poets or prophets,—he fancied that she knew how ardent was his desire to see her, and also the reason for it. "Yes, Madame," he said; "and I think that affair very singular."—"The affair of the bracelets," she exclaimed eagerly,—"you mean that, I suppose?"—"Yes, Madame."

"And do you think that the king is in love? Tell me!" De Guiche gave her a long and steady look; her eyes sank under his gaze, which seemed to read her very heart. "I think," he said, "that the king may possibly have had the idea of annoying some one here. Were it not for that, the king would not show himself so earnest in his attentions as he is; he would not run the risk of compromising, from mere thoughtlessness of disposition, a young girl against whom no one has been hitherto

able to say a word."—"Indeed! the bold, shameless girl!" said the princess, haughtily.

"I can positively assure your royal Highness," said De Guiche, with a respectful firmness, "that Mademoiselle de la Vallière is beloved by a man who merits every respect, for he is a brave and honourable gentleman."—"Bragelonne, perhaps?"—"My friend; yes, Madame."—"Well, and although he is your friend, what does that matter to the king?"—"The king knows that Bragelonne is affianced to Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and as Raoul has served the king most valiantly, the king will not inflict an irreparable injury upon him."

Madame began to laugh in a manner that produced a mournful impression upon De Guiche. "I repeat, Madame, I do not believe that the king is in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and the proof that I do not believe it is that I was about to ask you whose *amour propre* it is likely the king is, in this circumstance, desirous of wounding? You, who are well acquainted with the whole court, can perhaps assist me in ascertaining that; and assuredly with greater reason, too, since it is everywhere said that your royal Highness is on very intimate terms with the king."

Madame bit her lips, and, unable to assign any good and sufficient reasons, changed the conversation. "Prove to me," she said, fixing on him one of those looks in which the whole soul seems to pass into the eyes,—"prove to me that you intended to question me thus at the very moment I sent for you."

De Guiche gravely drew from his tablets what he had written, and showed it to her.—"Sympathy," she said.—"Yes," said the count, with a tenderness which he could not suppress, "sympathy. I have explained to you how and why I sought you; you, Madame, have yet to tell me why you sent for me."—"True," replied the princess. She hesitated, and then suddenly exclaimed, "Those bracelets will drive me mad!"

"You expected that the king would offer them to you," replied De Guiche.—"Why not?"—"But before you, Madame, before you, his sister-in-law, was there not the queen herself, to whom the king should have offered them?"—"Before La Vallière," cried the princess, wounded to the quick, "could he not have presented them to me? Was there not the whole court, indeed, to choose from?"

"I assure you, Madame," said the count, respectfully, "that if any one were to hear you speak in this manner, if any one

were to see how red your eyes are, and, Heaven forgive me! to see, too, that tear trembling on your eyelids, it would be said that your royal Highness was jealous."—"Jealous!" said the princess, haughtily; "jealous of La Vallière!" She expected to see De Guiche yield beneath her haughty gesture and her proud tone; but he boldly repeated, "Jealous of La Vallière; yes, Madame."

"Am I to suppose, Monsieur," she stammered, "that you suffer yourself to insult me?"—"Pray, do not suppose any such thing, Madame," replied the count, slightly agitated, but resolved to master that fiery nature.—"Leave the room!" said the princess, thoroughly exasperated; De Guiche's coolness and silent respect had made her completely lose her temper. De Guiche fell back a step, made his obeisance slowly, drew himself up looking as white as his lace cuffs, and in a voice slightly trembling, said, "It was hardly worth while to have hurried here to be subjected to this unmerited disgrace;" and he turned away deliberately.

He had scarcely taken half-a-dozen steps when Madame darted like a tigress after him, seized him by the cuff, and making him turn round again, said, trembling with passion as she did so: "The respect that you pretend to have is more insulting than the insult itself. Insult me, if you please, but at least speak!"—"And do you, Madame," said the count, gently, as he drew his sword, "thrust this sword into my heart rather than kill me by slow degrees!" At the look he fixed upon her,—a look full of love, resolution, and despair even,—she knew how readily the man, so outwardly calm in appearance, would pass his sword through his own breast if she added another word. She tore the blade from his hands, and pressing his arm with a feverish impatience which might pass for tenderness, said: "Do not be too hard with me, Count! You see how I am suffering, and you have no pity for me."

Tears, which were the last crisis of the attack, smothered her voice. As soon as De Guiche saw her weep, he took her in his arms and carried her to an arm-chair; in another moment she was choking with sobs. "Oh! why," he murmured, as he knelt by her side, "why do you conceal your troubles from me? Do you love any one? Tell me! It would kill me, I know,—but not until after I should have comforted, consoled, and even served you."—"And do you love me to that extent?" she replied, completely conquered.—"I do indeed love you to that extent, Madame."

She placed both her hands in his. "My heart is indeed another's," she murmured in so low a tone that her voice could hardly be heard; but he heard it, and said,—"Is it the king you love?" She gently shook her head; and her smile was like a clear bright streak in the clouds, through which, after the tempest had passed away, one almost fancies Paradise is opening. "But," she added, "there are other passions stirring in a high-born heart. Love is poetry; but the life of the heart is pride. Count, I was born upon a throne; I am proud and jealous of my rank. Why does the king gather such unworthy objects round him?"

"Once more, I repeat," said the count, "you are acting unjustly towards that poor girl, who will one day be my friend's wife."—"Are you simple enough to believe that, Count?"—"If I did not believe it," he said, turning very pale, "Bragelonne should be informed of it to-morrow; indeed he should, if I thought that poor La Vallière had forgotten the vows she had exchanged with Raoul. But no, it would be cowardly to betray any woman's secret; it would be criminal to disturb a friend's peace of mind."

"You think, then," said the princess, with a wild burst of laughter, "that ignorance is happiness?"—"I believe it," he replied.—"Prove it to me, then," she said quickly.

"It is easily done, Madame. It is reported through the whole court that the king loves you, and that you return his affection."—"Well?" she said, breathing with difficulty.—"Well, suppose for a moment that Raoul, my friend, had come and said to me, 'Yes, the king loves Madame, and has made an impression upon her heart,' I possibly should have slain Raoul."—"It would have been necessary," said the princess, with the obstinacy of a woman who feels herself not easily overcome, "for M. de Bragelonne to have had proofs, before he could venture to speak to you in that manner."

"It is, however, true," replied De Guiche, with a deep sigh, "that, not having been warned, I have learned nothing; and I now find that my ignorance has saved my life."—"So, then, you would drive your selfishness and coldness so far," said Madame, "that you would let this unhappy young man continue to love La Vallière?"—"I would, until La Vallière's guilt were revealed to me, Madame."—"But the bracelets?"—"Well, Madame, since you yourself expected to receive them from the king, what could I possibly have said?"

The argument was a telling one, and the princess was over-

whelmed by it; and from that moment her defeat was assured. But as her heart and mind were instinct with noble and generous feelings, she understood De Guiche's extreme delicacy. She saw clearly that in his heart he really suspected that the king was in love with La Vallière, and that he did not wish to resort to the common expedient of ruining a rival in the mind of a woman, by giving the latter the assurance and certainty that this rival's affections were transferred to another woman. She guessed that his suspicions of La Vallière were aroused, and that, in order to leave himself time for his conviction to undergo a change so as not to ruin her utterly, he was determined to pursue a certain straightforward line of conduct and gain a clearer understanding of affairs. She could read so much real greatness of character and such true generosity of disposition in her lover, that her heart seemed to warm with affection towards him, whose passion for her was so pure and delicate in its nature. Despite his fear of incurring her displeasure, De Guiche, by retaining his position as a man of proud independence of feeling and of deep devotion, became almost a hero in her estimation, and reduced her to the state of a jealous and small-minded woman. She loved him for it so tenderly that she could not refuse to give him a proof of her affection.

"See how many words we have wasted!" she said, taking his hand; "suspicions, anxieties, mistrust, sufferings,—I think we have mentioned all those words."—"Alas, Madame, yes."—"Efface them from your heart as I drive them from mine. Count, whether La Vallière does or does not love the king, and whether the king does or does not love La Vallière, we will make from this moment a distinction in our two rôles. You open your eyes so wide that I am sure you do not understand me."

"You are so impetuous, Madame, that I always tremble at the fear of displeasing you."—"And see how he trembles now, poor fellow!" she said, with the most charming playfulness of manner. "Yes, Monsieur, I have two parts to perform. I am the sister of the king, the sister-in-law of the king's wife. In this character ought I not to take an interest in these domestic intrigues? Come, tell me what you think!"—"As little as possible, Madame."

"Agreed, Monsieur! But it is a question of dignity; and then, you know, I am the wife of the king's brother." De Guiche sighed. "A circumstance," she added, with an expression of great tenderness, "which will remind you that I am

always to be treated with the profoundest respect." De Guiche fell at her feet, which he kissed with the religious fervour of a worshipper. "And I begin to think," she murmured, "that, really and truly, I have another part to perform. I was almost forgetting it."—"Name it, oh, name it!"—"I am a woman," she said, in a voice lower than ever, "and I love." He rose; she opened her arms, and their lips were pressed together. A footstep was heard behind the tapestry, and Montalais knocked.

"What is it, Mademoiselle?" said Madame.—"M. de Guiche is wanted," replied Montalais, who was just in time to see the agitation of the actors of these four rôles; for De Guiche had constantly carried out his part with the greatest heroism.

CHAPTER CL

MONTALAIS AND MALICORNE

Montalais was right. M. de Guiche, summoned in every direction, was very much exposed, even from the multitude of affairs, to the risk of not answering to any of them. Madame, notwithstanding her wounded pride and her secret anger, could not, for the moment at least, reproach Montalais for having violated in so bold a manner the semi-royal order with which she had been dismissed. De Guiche also lost his presence of mind, or it would be better to say that he had already lost it before Montalais's arrival; for scarcely had he heard the young girl's voice, when, without taking leave of Madame,—as the most ordinary politeness required, even between persons equal in rank and station,—he fled from her presence, his heart tumultuously throbbing, and his brain on fire, leaving the princess with one hand raised, as though about to bid him adieu. De Guiche could say, as Chérubin said a hundred years later, that he bore away on his lips happiness enough to last an eternity. Montalais was at no loss, therefore, to perceive the agitation of the two lovers; the one who fled was agitated, and the one who remained was equally so. "So, so," murmured the young girl, as she glanced inquisitively round her, "this time, at least, I think I know as much as the most curious woman could possibly wish to know." Madame felt so embarrassed by this inquisitorial look, that, as if she had heard Montalais's side-remark, she did not speak a word to her maid

of honour, but casting down her eyes retired at once to her bedroom.

Montalais, observing this, stood listening for a moment, and then heard Madame lock and bolt her door. By this she knew that the rest of the evening was at her own disposal; and making behind the door which had just been closed a rather disrespectful gesture which might mean "Good-night, Princess," she went down the staircase in search of Malicorne, who was very busily engaged at that moment in watching a courier who, covered with dust, had just left the Comte de Guiche's apartments. Montalais knew that Malicorne was engaged in a matter of some importance; she therefore allowed him to look and stretch out his neck as much as he pleased, and it was only when he had resumed his natural position that she touched him on the shoulder. "Well," said Montalais, "what is the news?" —"M. de Guiche is in love with Madame," said Malicorne.

"Fine news, truly! I know something more recent than that."—"Well, what do you know?"—"That Madame is in love with M. de Guiche."—"The one is the consequence of the other."—"Not always, my good Monsieur."—"Is that remark intended for me?"—"Persons present are always excepted."—"Thank you," said Malicorne. "Well, and in the other direction what is there fresh?"

"The king wished, this evening, after the lottery, to see Mademoiselle de la Vallière."—"Well, and he has seen her?"—"No, indeed."—"What do you mean by that?"—"The door was shut and locked."—"So that—"—"So that the king was obliged to go back again, looking very sheepish, like a simple-minded thief who has forgotten his implements."

"Good!"—"And in the third direction," inquired Montalais.

"The courier who has just arrived for M. de Guiche came from M. de Bragelonne."—"Excellent!" said Montalais, clapping her hands together.—"Why so?"—"Because we shall have occupation. If we get weary now, something unfortunate will be sure to happen."

"We must divide the work, then," said Malicorne, "in order to avoid confusion."—"Nothing easier," replied Montalais. "Three intrigues, carefully nursed and carefully encouraged, will produce, one with another, and taking a low average, three love-letters a day."—"Oh!" exclaimed Malicorne, shrugging his shoulders, "you cannot mean what you say, darling; three letters a day,—that may do for sentimental common people. A musketeer on duty, a young girl in a convent, may exchange

letters with their lovers once a day, perhaps, from the top of a ladder or through a hole in the wall. A letter contains all the poetry their poor little hearts have to boast of. But here,—oh, you little know royal affection, my dear!"

"Well, finish!" said Montalais, out of patience with him. "Some one may come."—"Finish! Why, I am only at the beginning. I have still three points as yet untouched."—"Upon my word, he will be the death of me, with his Flemish indifference!" exclaimed Montalais.—"And you will drive me mad with your Italian vivacity! I was going to say that our lovers here will be writing volumes to each other. But what are you driving at?"

"At this. Not one of our lady correspondents will be able to keep the letters she may receive."—"Very likely not."—"M. de Guiche will not be able to keep his, either."—"That is probable."—"Very well, then; I will take care of all that."—"That is the very thing which is impossible," said Malicorne.

"Why so?"—"Because you are not your own mistress,—your room is as much La Vallière's as yours, and there are certain persons who will think nothing of visiting and searching a maid of honour's room; because I am terribly afraid of the queen, who is as jealous as a Spaniard; of the queen-mother, who is as jealous as a couple of Spaniards; and, last of all, of Madame herself, who has jealousy enough for ten Spaniards."—"You forget some one else?"—"Who?"—"Monsieur."

"I was only speaking of the women. Let us add them up then: we will call Monsieur, No. 1; No. 2, De Guiche; No. 3, the Vicomte de Bragelonne; No. 4, the king."—"The king?"—"Of course, the king, who not only will be more jealous, but still more powerful than all the rest put together. Ah, my dear!"—"Well?"—"Into what a wasp's nest you have thrust yourself!"

"And as yet not quite far enough, if you will follow me into it."—"Most certainly I will follow you. Yet—"—"Well, yet—"—"While we have time enough left, I think it will be more prudent to turn back."—"But I, on the contrary, think the most prudent course to take is to put ourselves at once at the head of all these intrigues."—"You will never be able to do it."

"With you, I could carry on ten of them. I am in my element, you must know. I was born to live at the court, as the salamander is made to live in the fire."—"Your comparison does not reassure me in the slightest degree in the world, my

dear Montalais. I have heard it said, and by very learned men too, that, in the first place, there are no salamanders at all, and that if there were any, they would be perfectly roasted on leaving the fire."

"Your learned men may be very wise so far as salamanders are concerned, but your learned men would never tell you what I can tell you; namely, that Aure de Montalais is destined, before a month is over, to become the first diplomat in the Court of France."—"Be it so; but on condition that I shall be the second."—"Agreed; an offensive and defensive alliance, of course."—"Only be very careful of any letters."—"I will hand them to you as fast as I receive them."

"What shall we tell the king about Madame?"—"That Madame is still in love with his Majesty."—"What shall we tell Madame about the king?"—"That she would be exceedingly wrong not to humour him."—"What shall we tell La Vallière about Madame?"—"Whatever we choose, for La Vallière is in our power."

"How so?"—"In two ways."—"What do you mean?"—"In the first place, through the Vicomte de Bragelonne."—"Explain yourself?"—"You do not forget, I hope, that M. de Bragelonne has written many letters to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"—"I forget nothing."—"Well, then, it was I who received, and I who kept, those letters."—"And, consequently, it is you who have them still?"—"Yes."—"Where,—here?"—"Oh, no; I have them safe at Blois, in the little room you know well enough."

"That dear little room, that darling little room, the antechamber of the palace I intend you to live in one of these days. But I beg your pardon, you said that all those letters are in that little room?"—"Yes."—"Did you not put them in a box?"—"Of course; in the same box where I put all the letters I received from you, and where I put mine also when your business or your amusements prevented you from coming to our rendezvous."—"Ah, very good!" said Malicorne.

"Why are you so satisfied?"—"Because I see that there is a possibility of not having to run to Blois after the letters, for I have them here."—"You have brought the box away?"—"It was very dear to me because it belonged to you."—"Be sure to take care of it, for it contains original documents which will be of very great value by and by."—"I am perfectly well aware of that, indeed; and that is the very reason why I laugh as I do, and with all my heart too."

"And now, one last word."—"Why the last?"—"Do we need any one to assist us?"—"No one at all."—"Valets or maid-servants?"—"Bad,—detestable! You will give the letters, you will receive them. Oh! we must have no pride in this affair; otherwise M. Malicorne and Mademoiselle Aure, not transacting their own affairs themselves, will have to make up their minds to see them transacted by others."

"You are quite right; but what is going on yonder in M. de Guiche's room?"—"Nothing; he is only opening his window."—"Let us be gone;" and they both immediately disappeared, all the terms of the compact having been agreed upon.

The window, which had just been opened, was, in fact, that of the Comte de Guiche. But it was not, as uninformed persons may think, alone with the hope of catching a glimpse of Madame through her curtains that he seated himself by the open window, for his preoccupation of mind was not wholly due to love. He had just received, as we have already stated, the courier who had been despatched to him by De Bragelonne, the latter having written to De Guiche a letter which had made the deepest impression upon him, and which he had read over and over again. "Strange, strange!" he murmured. "How powerful are the means by which destiny hurries men on towards their fate!" and leaving the window in order to approach nearer to the light, he again read over the letter which he had just received, whose lines seemed to burn through his eyes into his brain.

"CALAIS.

"MY DEAR COUNT,—I found M. de Wardes at Calais; he has been seriously wounded in an affair with the Duke of Buckingham. De Wardes is, as you know, unquestionably brave, but full of malevolent and wicked feelings. He conversed with me about yourself, for whom he says he has a warm regard; and also about Madame, whom he considers a beautiful and amiable woman. He has guessed your affection for a certain person. He also talked to me about the person whom I love, and showed the greatest interest on my behalf in expressing a deep pity for me, accompanied, however, by dark hints which alarmed me at first, but which I at last looked upon as the result of his usual love of mystery. These are the facts: He had received news of the court; you will understand, however, that it was only through M. de Lorraine. The report is, so says the news, that a change has taken place in the king's affection. You know whom that concerns. In the second place, the news continues,

people are talking about one of the maids of honour, respecting whom various slanderous reports are being circulated. These vague phrases have not allowed me to sleep. I have been deploring, ever since yesterday, that my diffidence and vacillation of purpose should, notwithstanding a certain obstinacy of character I may possess, have left me unable to reply to these insinuations. In a word, therefore, M. de Wardes was setting off for Paris, and I did not delay his departure with explanations; for it seemed rather hard, I confess, to cross-examine a man whose wounds are hardly yet closed. In short, he was to travel by short stages, as he was anxious to leave, he said, in order to be present at a curious spectacle which the court cannot fail to offer within a very short time. He added a few congratulatory words, accompanied by certain sympathising expressions. I could not understand the one any more than the other; I was bewildered by my own thoughts, and by a mistrust of this man,—a mistrust which, as you know better than any one else, I have never been able to overcome. As soon as he left, my perception seemed to become clearer. It is hardly possible that a man of De Wardes's character should not have communicated something of his own malicious nature to the statements he made to me. Yet it is impossible that in the mysterious hints which he threw out in my presence there should not be some mysterious signification, which I might apply to myself or to some one with whom you are acquainted. Being compelled to leave as soon as possible, in obedience to the king's commands, the idea did not occur to me of running after M. de Wardes in order to obtain an explanation of his reserve; but I have despatched a courier to you with this letter, which will explain in detail all my various doubts. I regard you as myself. It is I who have thought, and it will be for you to act. M. de Wardes will arrive very shortly; endeavour to learn what he meant, if you do not already know it. M. de Wardes, moreover, pretended that the Duke of Buckingham left Paris crowned with Madame's love. This was an affair which would have unhesitatingly made me draw my sword, had I not felt that I was under the necessity of despatching the king's mission before undertaking any quarrel. Burn this letter, which Olivain will hand you. Whatever Olivain says you may confidently rely upon. Will you have the goodness, my dear count, to recall me to the remembrance of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whose hand I kiss with the greatest respect.—Your devoted

"VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

"P.S.—If anything serious should happen,—we should be prepared for everything, my dear friend,—despatch a courier to me with this single word, 'Come,' and I shall be in Paris within six-and-thirty hours after I shall have received your letter."

De Guiche sighed, folded the letter up a third time, and instead of burning it, as Raoul had recommended him to do, placed it in his pocket. He felt that he needed to read it over and over again. "How much distress of mind, and yet how great a confidence, he shows!" murmured the count. "Raoul has poured out his whole soul in this letter. He forgets to mention the Comte de la Fère, and speaks of his respect for Louise. He cautions me on my account, and entreats me on his own. Ah!" continued De Guiche, with a threatening gesture, "you interfere in my affairs, M. de Wardes, do you? Very well, then; I shall now occupy myself with yours. And for you, poor Raoul,—you who intrust your heart to my keeping,—be assured that I will watch over it."

With this promise, De Guiche sent to beg Malicorne to come immediately to his apartments, if it were possible. Malicorne complied with the invitation with an activity which was the first result of his conversation with Montalais. And while De Guiche, who thought that his motive was undiscovered, cross-examined Malicorne, the latter, who appeared to be working in the dark, soon guessed his questioner's motives. The consequence was that after a quarter of an hour's conversation, during which De Guiche thought that he had ascertained the whole truth with regard to La Vallière and the king, he had learned absolutely nothing more than his own eyes had already acquainted him with; while Malicorne learned or guessed that Raoul, who was absent, was fast becoming suspicious, and that De Guiche intended to watch over the treasure of the Hesperides. Malicorne accepted the office of dragon. De Guiche fancied that he had done everything for his friend, and soon began to think of nothing but his own personal affairs. The next evening, De Wardes's return and his first appearance at the king's reception were announced. When that visit had been paid, the convalescent waited on Monsieur; De Guiche taking care, however, to be at Monsieur's apartments before the visit took place.

CHAPTER CLI

HOW DE WARDES WAS RECEIVED AT COURT

MONSIEUR had welcomed De Wardes with that marked favour which all light and frivolous minds bestow on every novelty that may come in their way. De Wardes, whom indeed he had not seen for a month, was like fresh fruit to him. To treat him with marked kindness was an infidelity to his old friends, and there is always something fascinating in that; moreover, it was a sort of reparation to De Wardes himself. Nothing, consequently, could exceed the favourable notice Monsieur took of him. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who feared this rival not a little, but who respected a character and disposition which were precisely parallel to his own in every particular, with the addition of a courage which he did not himself possess, received De Wardes with a greater display of regard and affection than even Monsieur had shown. De Guiche, as we have said, was there also, but kept a little in the background, waiting very patiently until all these embraces were over.

De Wardes, while talking to the others, and even to Monsieur himself, had not for a moment lost sight of De Guiche, who he instinctively felt was there on his account. As soon as he had finished with the others, he went up to De Guiche. They both exchanged the most courteous compliments, after which De Wardes returned to Monsieur and to the other gentlemen. In the midst of these congratulations on a happy return, Madame was announced. She had been informed of De Wardes's arrival, and knowing all the details of his voyage and of his duel with Buckingham, was not sorry to be present to hear the remarks which she knew would be made without delay by one who she felt assured was her personal enemy. Two or three of her ladies accompanied her.

De Wardes saluted Madame in the most graceful and respectful manner, and, as a beginning of hostilities, announced, first of all, that he could furnish the Duke of Buckingham's friends with the latest news about him. This was a direct answer to the coldness with which Madame had received him. The attack was a vigorous one; and Madame felt the blow, but did not appear to have even noticed it. He rapidly cast a glance at Monsieur and at De Guiche; the former had coloured, and the

latter had turned very pale. Madame alone preserved an unmoved countenance; but as she knew how many unpleasant thoughts and feelings her enemy could awaken in the two persons who were listening to him, she smilingly bent forward towards the traveller, as if to listen to the news he had brought. But he was speaking of other matters. Madame was brave, even to imprudence. If she were to retreat, it would be inviting an attack; so, after the first disagreeable impression had passed away, she returned to the charge. "Have you suffered much from your wounds, M. de Wardes?" she inquired; "for we have been told that you had the misfortune to be wounded."

It was now De Wardes's turn to wince. He bit his lips, and replied, "No, Madame, hardly at all."—"And yet in this terribly hot weather—"—"The sea-breezes are fresh and cool, Madame; and then I had one consolation."—"Indeed! What was it?"—"The knowledge that my adversary's sufferings were still greater than my own."—"Ah! you mean that he was more seriously wounded than you were? I was not aware of that," said the princess, with utter indifference.—"Oh, Madame, you are mistaken, or rather you pretend to misunderstand my remark. I did not say that he was suffering more in body than myself; but his heart was seriously affected."

De Guiche comprehended in what direction the struggle was tending; he ventured to make a sign to Madame, as if entreating her to retire from the contest. But she, without acknowledging De Guiche's gesture, without showing that she had noticed it even, and still smiling, continued, "Is it possible," she said, "that the Duke of Buckingham's heart was touched? I had no idea, until now, that a heart-wound could be cured."—"Alas! Madame," replied De Wardes, politely, "every woman believes that; and it is that belief which gives them over us the superiority of confidence."—"You misunderstand altogether, dearest," said the prince, impatiently. "M. de Wardes means that the Duke of Buckingham's heart had been touched, not by a sword, but by something else."

"Ah, very good, very good!" exclaimed Madame. "It is a jest of M. de Wardes's. Very good; but I should like to know if the Duke of Buckingham would relish the jest. It is, indeed, a very great pity that he is not here, M. de Wardes." The young man's eyes seemed to flash fire. "Oh," he said, as he clinched his teeth, "there is nothing I should like better!"

De Guiche did not move. Madame seemed to expect that he would come to her assistance. Monsieur hesitated. The

Chevalier de Lorraine advanced and took up the conversation. "Madame," he said, "De Wardes knows perfectly well that for a Buckingham's heart to be touched is nothing new; and what he has said has already taken place."—"Instead of an ally, I have two enemies," murmured Madame,—"two determined enemies, and in league with each other;" and she changed the conversation. To change the conversation is, as every one knows, a right possessed by princes which etiquette requires all to respect. The remainder of the conversation was moderate enough in its tone; the principal actors had finished their parts.

Madame withdrew early; and Monsieur, who wished to question her on several matters, offered her his hand on leaving. The chevalier was seriously afraid that a good understanding might be established between the husband and wife if he were to leave them quietly together. He therefore made his way to Monsieur's apartments, in order to surprise him on his return, and to destroy with a few words all the good impressions that Madame might have been able to sow in his heart.

De Guiche advanced towards De Wardes, who was surrounded by a large number of persons, and thereby indicated his wish to converse with him. De Wardes at the same time showed, by his looks and by a movement of his head, that he perfectly understood him. There was nothing in these signs to enable strangers to suppose that they were not upon the most friendly footing. De Guiche could therefore turn away from him, and wait until he was at liberty. He had not long to wait,—for De Wardes, freed from his questioners, approached De Guiche; and both of them, after a fresh salutation, began to walk side by side together. "You have made a good impression since your return, my dear De Wardes," said the count.

"Excellent, as you see."—"And your spirits are just as lively as ever?"—"More than ever."—"That is great good fortune."—"Why not? Everything is so ridiculous in this world, everything is so absurd around us."—"You are right."—"You are of my opinion, then?"—"I should think so! And what news do you bring us from yonder?"—"I? None at all. I have come to look for news here."

"But, tell me, you must surely have seen some people at Boulogne,—one of our friends, for instance; it is not a long time ago."—"Some people,—one of our friends—"—"You have a short memory."—"Ah! true; Bragelonne, you mean."—"Exactly so."—"Who was on his way to fulfil a mission to

King Charles."—"Precisely. Well, then, did he not tell you, or did you not tell him—"

"I do not exactly know what I told him, I must confess; but I do know what I did not tell him." De Wardes was cunning itself. He perfectly well knew from De Guiche's tone and manner, which was cold and dignified, that the conversation was about to assume a disagreeable turn. He resolved to let it take what course it pleased, and to keep strictly on his guard. "May I ask what it was you did not tell him?" inquired De Guiche.

"Well, that about La Vallière."—"La Vallière— What is it? and what is that strange circumstance you seem to have known out yonder, with which Bragelonne, who was here on the spot, was not acquainted?"—"Do you really ask me that in a serious manner?"—"Nothing can be more so."—"What! you, a member of the court, living in Madame's household, a friend of Monsieur, a guest at their table, the favourite of our lovely princess!"

De Guiche coloured violently from anger. "To what princess are you alluding?" he said.—"I am only acquainted with one, my dear fellow. I am speaking of Madame herself. Are you devoted to another princess, then? Come, tell me!" De Guiche was on the point of launching out, but he saw the drift of the remark. A quarrel was imminent between the two young men. De Wardes wished the quarrel to be only in Madame's name, while De Guiche would not accept it except on La Vallière's account. From this moment it became a series of feigned attacks, which would continue until one of the two had been touched home. De Guiche therefore resumed all his self-possession.

"There is not the slightest question in the world of Madame in this matter, my dear De Wardes," said De Guiche, "but simply of what you were talking about just now."—"What was I saying?"—"That you had concealed certain things from M. de Bragelonne."—"Certain things which you know as well as I do," replied De Wardes.

"No, upon my honour!"—"Nonsense!"—"If you tell me what it is, I shall know, but not otherwise, I swear."—"What! I, who have just arrived from a distance of sixty leagues, and you, who have not stirred from this place, who have witnessed with your own eyes that of which rumour informed me at Calais,—do I understand you to tell me seriously that you do not know what it is about? Oh, Count, this is hardly charitable of you!"

"As you like, De Wardes; but I repeat, I know nothing."—"You are very discreet,—well, it is prudent."—"And so you will not tell me anything,—will not tell me any more than you told Bragelonne?"—"You are pretending to be deaf, I see. I am convinced that Madame could not possibly have more command over herself than you have over yourself."—"Double hypocrite!" murmured De Guiche, "there you are again returning to your own subject!"

"Very well, then," continued De Wardes, "since we find it so difficult to understand each other about La Vallière and Bragelonne, let us speak about your own affairs."—"Nay," said De Guiche, "I have no affairs of my own to talk about. You have not said anything about me, I suppose, to Bragelonne, which you cannot repeat to myself."—"No; but understand me, De Guiche, that however much I may be ignorant of certain matters, I am quite as conversant with others. If, for instance, we were conversing about certain intimacies of the Duke of Buckingham at Paris, as I did during my journey with the duke, I could tell you a great many interesting circumstances. Would you like me to mention them?"

De Guiche passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. "Why, no," he said, "a hundred times no! I have no curiosity for matters which do not concern me. The Duke of Buckingham is nothing more than a simple acquaintance, while Raoul is an intimate friend. I have not the slightest curiosity to learn what happened to the Duke of Buckingham, while I have, on the contrary, the greatest interest in learning what happened to Raoul."—"At Paris?"—"Yes, at Paris or at Boulogne. You understand, I am on the spot,—if anything should happen, I am here to meet it; while Raoul is absent, and has only myself to represent him: so Raoul's affairs before my own."

"But Raoul will return."—"Yes, when his mission is completed. In the meantime, you understand, evil reports cannot be permitted to circulate about him without my looking into them."—"And the more occasion, since he will remain some time in London," said De Wardes, chuckling.—"You think so?" asked De Guiche, simply.

"Think so, indeed! Do you suppose that he was sent to London for no other purpose than to go there and return again immediately? No, no; he was sent to London to remain there."—"Ah, Count!" said De Guiche, seizing De Wardes's hand violently, "that is a very serious suspicion concerning Brage-

lonne, which completely confirms what he wrote to me from Boulogne."

De Wardes resumed his former coldness of manner. His love of raillery had led him too far, and by his own imprudence he had laid himself open to attack. "Well, tell me, what did he write to you about?" he inquired.

"He told me that you had artfully insinuated some injurious remarks against La Vallière, and that you had seemed to laugh at his great confidence in that young girl."—"Well, it is perfectly true that I did so," said De Wardes, "and I was quite ready at the time to hear from the Vicomte de Bragelonne that which every man expects another to say whenever anything may have been said to displease him. In the same way, for instance, if I were seeking a quarrel with you I should tell you that Madame, after having shown the greatest preference for the Duke of Buckingham, is at this moment supposed to have sent the handsome duke away for your benefit."

"Oh, that would not wound me in the slightest degree, my dear De Wardes!" said De Guiche, smiling, notwithstanding the shiver which ran through his whole frame. "Why, such a favour as that would be too great a happiness."—"I admit that. But if I absolutely wished to quarrel with you I should try to invent a falsehood perhaps, and should speak to you about a certain grove where you and that illustrious princess were together,—I should speak also of certain genuflections, of certain kissings of the hand; and you, who are so secret on all occasions, so hasty and punctilious—"

"Well," said De Guiche, interrupting him, with the same smile upon his lips, although he felt almost as if he were going to die, "I swear I should not care for that, nor should I in any way contradict you; for you must know, my dear count, that in all matters which concern myself I am a block of ice. But it is a very different thing when an absent friend is concerned,—a friend who on leaving confided his interests to my safe-keeping; for such a friend, De Wardes, believe me, I am like fire itself."—"I understand you, M. de Guiche; but in spite of what you say, there cannot be any question between us just now, either of Bragelonne or of this insignificant young girl, whose name is La Vallière."

At this moment some of the younger courtiers were crossing the apartment, and having already heard the few words which had just been pronounced, were able also to hear those which were about to follow. De Wardes observed this, and continued

aloud: "Oh! if La Vallière were a coquette like Madame, whose very innocent flirtations, I am sure, were, first of all, the cause of the Duke of Buckingham's being sent to England, and afterwards were the reason of your being sent into exile, you—for you will not deny, I suppose, that Madame's seductive manners did have a certain influence over you—"—The courtiers drew nearer to the two speakers; De Saint-Aignan at their head, and then Manicamp.—"But, my dear fellow, whose fault was that?" said De Guiche, laughing. "I am a vain, conceited fellow, I know, and everybody else knows it too. I took seriously that which was intended only as a jest, and I got myself exiled for my pains. But I saw my error. I overcame my vanity, and I obtained my recall by making the *amende honorable*, and by promising myself to overcome this defect; and the consequence is that I am so thoroughly cured that I now laugh at the very thing which three or four days ago would have almost broken my heart. But Raoul is in love, and is loved in return; he cannot laugh at the reports which disturb his happiness,—reports which you seem to have undertaken to interpret, when you knew, Count, as I do, as those gentlemen do, as every one does in fact, that these reports were pure calumny."

"Calumny!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at seeing himself caught in the snare by De Guiche's coolness of temper.—"Certainly, a calumny. Look at this letter from him, in which he tells me you have spoken ill of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and asks me if what you said about this young girl be true. Do you wish me to appeal to these gentlemen, De Wardes, to decide?" and with the greatest coolness De Guiche read aloud the part of the letter which referred to La Vallière. "And now," continued De Guiche, "I have not the least doubt in the world that you wished to disturb Bragelonne's peace of mind, and that your remarks were maliciously intended."

De Wardes looked round him to see whether he could find support from any one; but at the idea that De Wardes had insulted, either directly or indirectly, the idol of the day, every one shook his head, and De Wardes saw that there was no one present who would have refused to say that he was in the wrong. "Messieurs," said De Guiche, intuitively divining the general feeling, "my discussion with M. de Wardes refers to a subject so delicate in its nature that it is most important that no one should hear more than you have already heard. Close the doors then, I beg you, and let us finish our conversation in the manner which becomes two gentlemen, one of whom has given the other

the lie."—"Messieurs, Messieurs!" exclaimed those who were present.

"It is your opinion, then, that I was wrong in defending Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said De Guiche. "In that case I pass judgment upon myself, and am ready to withdraw the offensive words which I may have used to M. de Wardes."—"*Peste!* certainly not!" said De Saint-Aignan. "Mademoiselle de la Vallière is an angel."—"Virtue and purity itself," said Manicamp.—"You see, M. de Wardes," said De Guiche, "that I am not the only one who undertakes the defence of that poor girl. I entreat you, therefore, Messieurs, a second time, to leave us. You see that it is impossible that we could be more calm and composed than we are." The courtiers asked nothing better than to go away. Some went out at one door, and the rest at another; and the two young men were left alone. "Well played," said De Wardes to the count.—"Was it not?" replied the latter.

"What can you expect, my dear fellow? I have got quite rusty in the country, while the command you have acquired over yourself, Count, confounds me. A man always gains something in woman's society; so pray accept my congratulations."—"I accept them."—"And I will make Madame a present of them."—"Oh! now, my dear M. de Wardes, let us speak of her as loudly as you please."

"Do not defy me!"—"Oh! I defy you! You are known to be an evil-minded man; if you do that, you will be looked upon as a coward too, and Monsieur will have you hanged, this evening, at his window-casement. Speak, my dear De Wardes, speak!"—"I have fought already."—"But not quite enough yet."—"I see that you would not be sorry to beat me soundly."—"No; better still!"

"The deuce! you are unfortunate in the moment you have chosen, my dear Count. A duel, after the one I have just fought, would hardly suit me. I have lost too much blood at Boulogne; at the slightest effort my wounds would open again, and you would really have too good a bargain with me."—"True," said De Guiche; "and yet on your arrival here, your looks and your arms showed that there was nothing the matter with you."—"Yes, my arms are all right, but my legs are weak. And then, I have not had a foil in my hand since that devil of a duel; while you, I will answer for it, have been fencing every day, in order to carry your little conspiracy against me to a successful issue."—"Upon my honour, Monsieur," replied De Guiche, "it is six months since I last practised."

"No, Count, after due deliberation, I will not fight, at least with you. I shall await Bragelonne's return, since you say that it is Bragelonne who has fault to find with me."—"Oh, no, indeed! You shall not wait until Bragelonne's return," exclaimed De Guiche, losing all command over himself, "for you have said that it might possibly be some time before Bragelonne returns, and in the meanwhile your wicked insinuations will have had their effect."—"Yet I shall have my excuse; so take care!"

"I will give you a week to finish your recovery."—"That is better. In a week we will see."—"Yes, yes, I understand; a week will give time to my adversary to make his escape. No, no; I will not give you one day, even."—"You are mad, Monsieur," said De Wardes, retreating a step.

"And you are a coward, if you do not fight willingly. Nay, what is more, I will denounce you to the king as having refused to fight after having insulted La Vallière."—"Ah!" said De Wardes, "you are dangerously treacherous, though you pass for a man of honour."—"There is nothing more dangerous than the treachery of the man whose conduct is always loyal and upright."—"Restore me the use of my legs, then, or get yourself bled, till you are as white as I am, so as to equalise our chances."—"No, no! I have something better than that to propose."—"What is it?"—"We will mount on horseback, and will exchange three pistol-shots each. You are a first-rate marksman. I have seen you bring down swallows with single balls, and at full gallop. Do not deny it, for I have seen you myself."

"I believe you are right," said De Wardes; "and as that is the case, it is not unlikely I might kill you."—"You would be rendering me a very great service, if you did."—"I will do my best."—"Is it agreed?"—"Give me your hand upon it."—"There it is,—but on one condition, however."—"Name it."—"That not a word shall be said about it to the king."—"Not a word, I swear."—"I shall go and get my horse, then."—"And I, mine."—"Where shall we meet?"—"In the open plain; I know an admirable place."—"Shall we go together?"—"Why not?"

Both of them, on their way to the stables, passed beneath Madame's windows, which were faintly lighted; a shadow could be seen on the lace curtains. "There is a woman," said De Wardes, smiling, "who does not suspect that we are going to fight—to die, perhaps,—on her account."

CHAPTER CLII

THE COMBAT

De Wardes and De Guiche selected their horses, and then saddled them with their own hands with holster-saddles. De Wardes had no pistols; so De Guiche, having two pairs of them, went to his rooms to get them; and after having loaded them, gave the choice to De Wardes, who selected the pair he had made use of twenty times before,—the same, indeed, with which De Guiche had seen him kill swallows flying. "You will not be surprised," he said, "if I take every precaution. You know the weapons well, and consequently I am only making the chances equal."—"Your remark was quite useless," replied De Guiche, "and you have done no more than you are entitled to do."

"Now," said De Wardes, "I beg you to have the goodness to help me to mount; for I still experience a little difficulty in doing so."—"In that case it would be better to settle the matter on foot."—"No; once in the saddle, I shall be all right."—"Very good, then; say no more," said De Guiche, as he assisted De Wardes to mount his horse.

"And now," continued De Wardes, "in our eagerness to kill each other, we have neglected one circumstance."—"What is that?"—"That it is quite dark, and we shall almost be obliged to grope about in order to kill each other."—"Well, the result will be the same."

"Moreover, we must observe one thing more, that men of honour do not go out to fight without companions."—"Oh!" said De Guiche, "you are as anxious as I am that everything should be done in proper order."—"Yes; but I do not wish people to say that you have assassinated me, any more than, supposing I were to kill you, I should myself like to be accused of such a crime."

"Did any one make a similar remark about your duel with the Duke of Buckingham?" said De Guiche; "it took place under precisely the same conditions as ours."—"Very true; but there was still light enough to see by, and we were up to our middles almost in the water; besides, there were a good number of spectators on shore looking at us." De Guiche reflected for a moment; and the thought which had already

presented itself to him became more confirmed,—that De Wardes wished to have witnesses present, in order to bring back the conversation about Madame, and to give a new turn to the combat. He did not say a word in reply therefore; and as De Wardes once more looked at him interrogatively, he replied, by a movement of the head, that it would be best to let things remain as they were.

The two adversaries consequently set off, and left the château by the gate close to which we may remember to have seen Montalais and Malicorne together. The night, as if to counteract the extreme heat of the day, had gathered the clouds together in masses which were moving slowly and silently along from the west to the east. The vault above, without a clear spot anywhere visible or without the faintest indication of thunder, seemed to hang heavily over the earth, and soon began, by the force of the wind, to be split up into fragments, like a huge sheet torn into shreds. Large and warm drops of rain began to fall heavily, and gathered the dust into globules, which rolled along the ground. At the same time the hedges, which seemed conscious of the approaching storm, the thirsty plants, the drooping branches of the trees, exhaled a thousand aromatic odours, which revived in the mind tender recollections, thoughts of youth, eternal life, happiness, and love."—"How fresh the earth smells!" said De Wardes; "it is a piece of coquetry of hers to draw us to her."

"By the by," replied De Guiche, "several ideas have just occurred to me, and I wish to have your opinion upon them."—"Relative to—"—"Relative to our engagement."—"It is quite time, it seems to me, that we should begin to arrange matters."

"Is it to be an ordinary combat, and conducted according to established custom?"—"Let me first know what your established custom is."—"That we dismount in any particular plain that may suit us, fasten our horses to the nearest object, meet each without our pistols in our hands, then retire for a hundred and fifty paces, in order to advance on each other."—"Very good; that is precisely the way in which I killed poor Follivent, three weeks ago, at St. Denis."

"I beg your pardon, but you forget one circumstance."—"What is that?"—"That in your duel with Follivent you advanced towards each other on foot, your swords between your teeth and your pistols in your hands."—"True."—"While now, on the contrary, as you cannot walk,—you yourself admit

that,—we shall have to mount our horses again, and charge; and the first who wishes to fire will do so."—"That is the best course, no doubt; but it is quite dark. We must make allowance for more missed shots than would be the case in the daytime."—"Very well; each will fire three times,—the pair of pistols already loaded, and one reload."

"Excellent! Where shall our engagement take place?"—"Have you any preference?"—"No."—"You see that small wood which lies before us?"—"The wood which is called Rochin? Certainly."—"You know it, then?"—"Perfectly."—"You know, then, that there is an open glade in the centre?"—"Yes."—"Well, this glade is a natural arena, with a variety of roads, by-places, paths, ditches, windings, and avenues. We could not find a better spot."—"I am perfectly satisfied, if you are so. We have arrived, if I am not mistaken."

"Yes. Look at the beautiful open space in the centre. The faint light which the stars afford, as Corneille says, seems concentrated in this spot; the woods which surround it seem, with their barriers, to form its natural limits."—"Very good. Do, then, as you say."

"Let us first settle the conditions."—"These are mine; if you have any objection to make, you will state it."—"I am listening."—"If the horse be killed, its rider will be obliged to fight on foot."—"That is a matter of course, since we have no change of horses here."

"But that does not oblige his adversary to dismount."—"His adversary will be free to act as he likes."—"The adversaries, having once met in close contact, cannot withdraw again, and may consequently fire muzzle to muzzle."—"Agreed."—"Three shots and no more."—"Quite sufficient, I think. Here are powder and balls for your pistols. Measure out three charges, take three balls; I will do the same. Then we will throw the rest of the powder and the balls away."

"And we will solemnly swear," said De Wardes, "that we have neither balls nor powder about us?"—"Agreed; and I swear it," said De Guiche, holding his hand towards heaven,—a gesture which De Wardes imitated.

"And now, my dear Count," said De Wardes, "allow me to tell you that I am in no way your dupe. You are, or soon will be, the accepted lover of Madame. I have detected your secret, and you are afraid I shall make it known. You wish to kill me, to ensure my silence,—that is very clear; and in your place I should do the same." De Guiche hung down his head. "Only,"

continued De Wardes, triumphantly, "was it really worth while, tell me, to throw this mean affair of Bragelonne's upon my shoulders? But, take care, my dear fellow! in bringing the wild boar to bay, you enrage him to madness; in running down the fox, you give him the ferocity of the jaguar. The consequence is, that, brought to bay by you, I shall defend myself to the very last."—"You will be quite right in doing so."—"Yes; but take care! I shall work more harm than you think. In the first place, as a beginning, you will readily suppose that I have not been absurd enough to lock up my secret, or your secret rather, in my own breast. There is a friend of mine, a man of the highest intelligence, whom you know very well, who shares my secret with me; so pray understand that if you kill me, my death will not have been of much service to you; while, on the contrary, if I kill you—and everything is possible, you understand?" De Guiche shuddered. "If I kill you," continued De Wardes, "you will have secured Madame two mortal enemies, who will do their very utmost to ruin her."

"Oh, Monsieur," exclaimed De Guiche, furiously, "do not reckon upon my death so easily! Of the two enemies you speak of, I trust most heartily to dispose of one immediately, and of the other at the earliest opportunity." The only reply De Wardes made was a burst of laughter, so diabolical in its sound that a superstitious man would have been terrified by it. But De Guiche was not so impressionable as that. "I think," he said, "that everything is now settled, M. de Wardes; so have the goodness to take your place first, unless you would prefer to have me do so."

"By no means," said De Wardes. "I shall be delighted to save you the slightest trouble;" and putting his horse into a gallop, he crossed the wide open space, and took his stand at the point of the circle which was immediately opposite to where De Guiche was stationed. De Guiche remained motionless. At the distance of about a hundred paces the two adversaries were absolutely invisible to each other, being completely concealed by the thick shade of elms and chestnuts. A minute elapsed amid the profoundest silence. At the end of the minute, each of them, in the deep shade in which he was concealed, heard the double click of the trigger, as they put the pistols at full cock. De Guiche, adopting the usual tactics, set his horse into a gallop, persuaded that he should find a twofold security in the undulatory movement and in the swiftness of his course. He charged in a straight line towards the point where, in his

opinion, his adversary would be stationed, and he expected to meet De Wardes about half-way; but in this he was mistaken. He continued his course, presuming that De Wardes had not moved and was awaiting his approach. When, however, he had gone about two-thirds of the distance, he saw the place suddenly illuminated, and a ball whistled by, cutting the plume of his hat in two. Nearly at the same moment, and as if the flash of the first shot had served to give light for the aim of the other, a second report was heard, and a second ball passed through the head of De Guiche's horse, a little below the ear. The animal fell.

These two reports proceeding from the very opposite direction to that in which he expected to find De Wardes, struck De Guiche with surprise; but as he was a man of great self-possession, he prepared himself for his horse's falling,—not so completely, however, but that his boot was caught under the animal as it fell. Very fortunately, the horse in its dying agonies moved so as to enable him to release his leg, which was not much bruised. De Guiche rose, felt himself all over, and found that he was not wounded. At the very moment when he had felt the horse tottering under him, he had placed his pistols in the holsters, afraid that the force of the fall might explode one at least, if not both of them, by which accident he would have been needlessly disarmed. Once on his feet, he took the pistols out of the holsters, and advanced towards the spot where, by the light of the flash, he had seen De Wardes appear.

De Guiche had at the first shot accounted for his adversary's manœuvre, than which nothing could have been simpler. Instead of advancing to meet De Guiche, or remaining in his place to await his approach, De Wardes had for about fifteen paces followed the circle of shade, where he could not be seen by his adversary; and at the very moment when the latter presented his flank in his career, he had fired from the place where he stood, carefully taking his aim, and assisted instead of being inconvenienced by the horse's gallop. It has been seen that, notwithstanding the darkness, the first ball had passed hardly more than an inch above De Guiche's head. De Wardes had been so sure of his aim that he had expected to see De Guiche fall; his astonishment was extreme when, on the contrary, the rider still remained erect in his saddle. He hastened to fire his second shot; but his hand trembled, and he killed the horse instead. It would be a most fortunate chance for him if De Guiche were to remain held fast under the animal.

Before he could have freed himself, De Wardes would have loaded his pistol for his third shot and had De Guiche at his mercy. But De Guiche, on the contrary, was up, and had three shots to fire.

De Guiche immediately understood the position of affairs. It would be necessary to exceed De Wardes in quickness. He advanced, therefore, so as to reach him before he should have had time to reload his pistol. De Wardes saw him approaching like a tempest. The ball was rather tight, and offered some resistance to the ramrod. To load it carelessly would be to expose himself to lose his last chance; to take the proper care in loading it would be to lose his time, or rather it would be throwing away his life. He made his horse bound to one side. De Guiche turned also; and at the moment the horse was quiet again he fired, and the ball carried De Wardes's hat from his head. De Wardes knew that he had a moment's time at his disposal; he availed himself of it to finish loading his pistol. De Guiche, noticing that his adversary did not fall, threw the pistol he had just discharged aside, and walked straight towards De Wardes, elevating the second pistol as he did so. He had hardly proceeded more than two or three paces, when De Wardes took aim at him as he was walking, and fired. An exclamation of anger was De Guiche's answer; the count's arm contracted and dropped by his side, and the pistol fell from his grasp. De Wardes saw the count stoop down, pick up the pistol with his left hand, and again advance towards him. It was a critical moment. "I am lost," murmured De Wardes; "he is not mortally wounded." At the very moment, however, that De Guiche was about to raise his pistol against De Wardes, the head, shoulders, and limbs of the count seemed to give way all at once. He heaved a deep-drawn sigh, tottered, and fell at the feet of De Wardes's horse.

"That is all right," said De Wardes; and gathering up the reins, he struck his spurs into his horse's sides. The horse cleared the count's motionless body, and bore De Wardes rapidly back to the château. When he arrived there, he remained a quarter of an hour deliberating within himself as to the proper course to be adopted. In his impatience to leave the field of battle, he had neglected to ascertain whether De Guiche were dead or not. A double hypothesis presented itself to De Wardes's agitated mind,—either De Guiche was killed, or De Guiche was wounded only. If he were killed, why should he leave his body in that manner to the wolves? It was a perfectly useless

piece of cruelty; for if De Guiche were dead, he certainly could not breathe a syllable of what had passed. If he were not killed, why should he, De Wardes, by leaving him there uncared for, allow himself to be regarded as a savage, incapable of one generous feeling? This last consideration prevailed.

De Wardes immediately instituted inquiries for Manicamp. He was told that Manicamp had been looking for De Guiche, and not knowing where to find him, had retired to bed. De Wardes went and woke the sleeper, and related the whole affair to him, to which Manicamp listened in perfect silence, but with an expression of momentarily increasing energy, of which his face would hardly have been supposed capable. It was only when De Wardes had finished, that Manicamp uttered the words, "Let us go."

As they proceeded, Manicamp became more and more excited; and in proportion as De Wardes related the details of the affair to him, his countenance darkened. "And so," he said, when De Wardes had finished, "you think that he is dead?"—"Alas! I do."—"And you fought in that manner, without witnesses?"—"He insisted upon it."—"It is very singular."—"What do you mean by saying that it is singular?"—"That it is so very unlike M. de Guiche's disposition."

"You do not doubt my word, I suppose?"—"Hum! hum!"—"You do doubt it, then?"—"A little. But I shall doubt it more than ever, I warn you, if I find that the poor fellow is really dead."—"M. Manicamp!"—"M. de Wardes!"—"It seems that you intend to insult me."—"Just as you please. The fact is, I never could like those people who come and say to you, 'I have killed M. So-and-so in a corner; it is a great pity, but I killed him in a perfectly honourable manner.' It has a very ugly appearance, M. de Wardes."

"Silence! we have arrived." In fact, the little open glade could now be seen, and in the open space lay the motionless body of the dead horse. To the right of the horse, upon the dark grass, with his face against the ground, the poor count lay, bathed in his blood. He had remained in the same spot, and did not even seem to have made the slightest movement. Manicamp threw himself on his knees, lifted the count in his arms, and found him quite cold, and steeped in blood. He let him gently fall again. Then, stretching out his hand and feeling all over the ground close to where the count lay, he sought until he found De Guiche's pistol.

"By Heaven!" he said, rising to his feet, pale as death, and

with the pistol in his hand, "you were not mistaken; he is quite dead."—"Dead!" repeated De Wardes.—"Yes; and his pistol is still loaded," added Manicamp, feeling the pan with his finger.

"But I told you that I took aim as he was walking towards me, and fired at him at the very moment when he was aiming at me."—"Are you quite sure that you have fought with him, M. de Wardes? I confess that I am very much afraid you have assassinated him. Oh, no exclamations! You have had your three shots, and his pistol is still loaded. You have killed his horse, and he, De Guiche, one of the best marksmen in France, has not even touched either your horse or yourself. Well, M. de Wardes, you have been very unlucky in bringing me here. All the blood in my body seems to have mounted to my head; and I verily believe that since so good an opportunity presents itself, I shall blow out your brains on the spot. So, M. de Wardes, recommend your soul to Heaven."

"M. de Manicamp, you cannot think of such a thing!"—"On the contrary, I am thinking of it very strongly."—"Would you assassinate me?"—"Without the slightest remorse, at least for the present."—"Are you a gentleman?"—"I have given a great many proofs of it."—"Let me defend my life, then, at least."—"Very likely; in order, I suppose, that you may do to me what you have done to poor De Guiche;" and Manicamp slowly raised his pistol to the height of De Wardes's breast, and with arm stretched out, and a determined scowl on his face, took a careful aim.

De Wardes did not attempt a flight; he was completely terrified. Then, in the midst of this horrible silence, which lasted about a second, but which seemed an age to De Wardes, a faint sigh was heard. "Oh," exclaimed De Wardes, "he lives! he lives! Help, M. de Guiche! I am about to be assassinated!"

Manicamp fell back a step or two, and the two young men saw the count raise himself slowly and painfully upon one hand. Manicamp threw the pistol away a dozen paces, and ran to his friend, uttering a cry of delight. De Wardes wiped his forehead, which was bathed in a cold perspiration. "It was time," he murmured.—"How much are you hurt?" inquired Manicamp of De Guiche, "and where?" De Guiche showed him his mutilated hand and his chest covered with blood.

"Count," exclaimed De Wardes, "I am accused of having assassinated you; speak, I implore you, and say that I fought fairly."—"It is true," said the wounded man. "M. de Wardes

fought quite fairly; and whoever may say the contrary will make me his enemy."—"Then, sir," said Manicamp, "assist me, in the first place, to carry this poor fellow back, and I will afterwards give you every satisfaction you please. Or if you are in a hurry, we can do better still: let us stanch the blood from the count's wounds here with your pocket-handkerchief and mine; and then, as there are two shots left, we can have them between us."

"Thank you," said De Wardes. "Twice already in one hour I have seen Death too close at hand to be agreeable; I don't like his look at all, and I prefer your apologies." Manicamp burst out laughing, and De Guiche, too, in spite of his sufferings. The two young men wished to carry him, but he declared that he felt himself quite strong enough to walk alone. The ball had broken his ring-finger and his little finger, and then had glanced along his side, but without penetrating deeply into his chest. It was the pain rather than the seriousness of the wound, therefore, which had overcome De Guiche. Manicamp passed his arm under one of the count's shoulders, and De Wardes did the same with the other; and in this way they brought him back to Fontainebleau, to the house of the same doctor who had been present at the death of the Franciscan, Aramis's predecessor.

CHAPTER CLIII

THE KING'S SUPPER

THE king, meanwhile, had sat down to the supper-table, and the not very large number of guests invited for that day had taken their seats, after the usual gesture intimating the royal permission to be seated. At this period of Louis XIV.'s reign, although etiquette was not governed by the strict regulations which subsequently were adopted, the French court had entirely thrown aside the traditions of good-fellowship and patriarchal affability which still existed in the time of Henry IV., and which the suspicious mind of Louis XIII. had gradually replaced by the ceremonial semblance of a grandeur which he despaired of being able fully to realise.

The king, then, was seated alone at a small separate table, which, like the desk of a president, overlooked the adjoining tables. Although we say a small table, we must not omit to add that this small table was yet the largest one there. More-

over, it was the one on which were placed the greatest number and variety of dishes,—consisting of fish, game, meat, fruit, vegetables, and preserves. The king was young and vigorous, very fond of hunting, addicted to all violent exercises of the body, and possessed, besides, like all the members of the Bourbon family, a rapid digestion and an appetite speedily renewed. Louis XIV. was a formidable table-companion. He delighted to criticise his cooks; but when he honoured them by praise and commendation, the honour was overwhelming. The king began by eating several kinds of soup, either mixed together or taken separately. He intermingled, or rather he isolated, the soups with glasses of old wine. He ate quickly and somewhat greedily.

Porthos, who from the beginning had out of respect been waiting for a jog of D'Artagnan's elbow, seeing the king make such rapid progress, turned to the musketeer and said in a low tone, "It seems as if one might go on now; his Majesty is very encouraging in the example he sets. Look!"—"The king eats," said D'Artagnan, "but he talks at the same time. Try to manage matters in such a manner that if he should happen to address a remark to you, he would not find you with your mouth full, for that would be very awkward."—"The best way, in that case," said Porthos, "is to eat no supper at all. And yet I am very hungry, I admit; and everything looks and smells most inviting, as if appealing to all my senses at once."

"Don't for a moment think of not eating," said D'Artagnan; "that would put his Majesty out terribly. The king has a habit of saying that he who works well eats well, and he does not like to have people eat daintily at his table."—"But how can I avoid having my mouth full if I eat?" said Porthos.

"All you have to do," replied the captain of the musketeers, "is simply to swallow what you have in it whenever the king does you the honour to address a remark to you."—"Very good," said Porthos; and from that moment he began to eat with a well-bred enthusiasm.

The king occasionally looked at the different persons who were at table with him, and as a connoisseur could appreciate the different dispositions of his guests. "M. du Vallon!" he said. Porthos was enjoying a ragout of hare, and swallowed half of the back. His name pronounced in such a manner made him start, and by a vigorous effort of his gullet he absorbed the whole mouthful. "Sire," replied Porthos, in a stifled voice, but sufficiently intelligible, nevertheless.

"Let that fillet of lamb be handed to M. du Vallon," said the king. "Do you like browned meats, M. du Vallon?"—"Sire, I like everything," replied Porthos. D'Artagnan whispered, "Everything your Majesty sends me." Porthos repeated, "Everything your Majesty sends me,"—an observation which the king apparently received with great satisfaction.

"People eat well who work well," replied the king, delighted to have opposite him a guest of Porthos's capacity. Porthos received the dish of lamb, and put a portion of it on his plate. "Well?" said the king.—"Exquisite," said Porthos, calmly. —"Have you as good mutton in your part of the country, M. du Vallon?" continued the king.—"Sire," said Porthos, "I believe that from my own province, as everywhere else, the best of everything is sent to Paris for your Majesty's use; but, on the other hand, I do not eat mutton in the same way your Majesty does."

"Ah! and how do you eat it?"—"Generally, I have a lamb dressed quite whole."—"Quite whole?"—"Yes, Sire."—"In what manner, then?"—"In this, Sire: my cook, who is a German, first stuffs the lamb in question with small sausages which he procures from Strasburg, forcemeat-balls which he procures from Troyes, and larks which he procures from Pithiviers; by some means or other, with which I am not acquainted, he bones the lamb as he would bone a fowl, leaving the skin on, however, which forms a brown crust all over the animal. When it is cut in beautiful slices, in the same way that one would cut an enormous sausage, a rose-coloured gravy issues forth, which is as agreeable to the eye as it is exquisite to the palate;" and Porthos finished by smacking his lips.

The king opened his eyes with delight, and, while cutting some of the *faisan en daube*, which was handed to him, he said: "That is a dish I should very much like to taste, M. du Vallon. Is it possible?—a whole lamb!"—"Yes, Sire."—"Pass those pheasants to M. du Vallon; I perceive that he is a connoisseur." The order was obeyed. Then, continuing the conversation, he said, "And you do not find the lamb too fat?"—"No, Sire; the fat falls down at the same time that the gravy does, and swims on the surface; then the servant who carves removes the fat with a silver spoon, which I have had made expressly for that purpose."

"Where do you reside?" inquired the king.—"At Pierrefonds, Sire."—"At Pierrefonds; where is that, M. du Vallon,—near Belle-Isle?"—"Oh, no, Sire; Pierrefonds is in the Sois-

sonnais."—"I thought that you alluded to the mutton on account of the salt marshes."—"No, Sire; I have marshes which are not salt, it is true, but which are not the less valuable on that account."

The king had now arrived at the *entrées*, but without losing sight of Porthos, who continued to play his part in his best manner. "You have an excellent appetite, M. du Vallon," said the king, "and you make an admirable table-companion."—"Ah, Sire, if your Majesty were ever to pay a visit to Pierrefonds, we would both of us eat our lamb together; for your appetite is not an indifferent one, by any means."

D'Artagnan gave Porthos a severe kick under the table, which made Porthos colour up. "At your Majesty's present happy age," said Porthos, in order to repair the mistake he had made, "I was in the musketeers, and nothing could ever satisfy me then. Your Majesty has an excellent appetite, as I have already had the honour of mentioning, but you select what you eat with too much refinement to be called a great eater."

The king seemed charmed at his guest's politeness. "Will you try some of these creams?" he said to Porthos.—"Sire, your Majesty treats me with far too much kindness to prevent me from speaking the whole truth."—"Pray do so, M. du Vallon."—"Well, Sire, with regard to sweet dishes, I recognise only pastry, and even that should be rather solid; all these frothy substances swell my stomach, and occupy a space which seems to me to be too precious to be so badly tenanted."—"Ah, Messieurs," said the king, indicating Porthos by a gesture, "here is indeed a perfect model of gastronomy. It was in such a manner that our fathers, who so well knew what good living was, used to eat; while we," added his Majesty, "can do nothing but trifle with our food;" and as he spoke he took a fresh plate of chicken, with ham, while Porthos attacked a ragout of partridges and land-rails.

The cup-bearer filled his Majesty's glass to the brim. "Give M. du Vallon some of my wine," said the king. This was one of the greatest honours of the royal table. D'Artagnan pressed his friend's knee. "If you can only manage to swallow the half of that boar's head I see yonder," said he to Porthos, "I shall believe that you will be a duke and a peer within the next twelvemonth."—"Presently," said Porthos, phlegmatically; "I shall come to it by and by."

In fact it was not long before it came to the boar's turn, for the king seemed to take a pleasure in urging on this famous

guest. He did not pass any of the dishes to Porthos until he had tasted them himself, and he accordingly took some of the boar's head. Porthos showed that he could keep pace with his sovereign; and instead of eating the half, as D'Artagnan had told him, he ate three-fourths of it. "It is impossible," said the king in an undertone, "that a gentleman who eats so good a supper every day and who has such beautiful teeth can be otherwise than the most praiseworthy man in my kingdom."—"Do you hear?" said D'Artagnan in his friend's ear.—"Yes; I think I am rather in favour," said Porthos, balancing himself on his chair.—"Oh, you are in luck's way!"

The king and Porthos continued to eat in the same manner, to the great satisfaction of the other guests, some of whom from emulation had attempted to follow them, but had been obliged to give up on the way. The king soon began to get flushed, and the reaction of the blood to his face announced that the moment of repletion had arrived. It was then that Louis XIV., instead of becoming gay and cheerful, as most good livers generally do, became dull, melancholy, and taciturn. Porthos, on the contrary, was lively and communicative. D'Artagnan's foot had more than once to remind him of this peculiarity of the king. The dessert now made its appearance. The king had ceased to think anything further of Porthos; he turned his eyes anxiously towards the entrance-door, and was heard occasionally to inquire how it happened that M. de Saint-Aignan was so long in arriving. At last, at the moment when his Majesty was finishing a pot of preserved plums with a deep sigh, M. de Saint-Aignan appeared. The king's eyes, which had become somewhat dull, immediately began to sparkle. The count advanced towards the king's table, and Louis rose at his approach. Everybody rose at the same time,—even Porthos, who was just finishing an almond cake which might have made the jaws of a crocodile stick together. The supper was over.

CHAPTER CLIV

AFTER SUPPER

THE king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, and passed into the adjoining room. "What has detained you, Count?" said the king.—"I was bringing the answer, Sire," replied the count.

"She has taken a long time to reply to what I wrote her."—"Sire, your Majesty has deigned to write in verse, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière wished to repay your Majesty in the same coin,—that is to say, in gold."—"Verses, De Saint-Aignan!" exclaimed the king, in ecstasy; "give them to me at once!" and Louis broke the seal of a little letter, enclosing the verses which history has preserved entire for us, and which are more meritorious in intention than in execution. Such as they were, however, the king was enchanted with them, and exhibited his satisfaction by unequivocal transports of delight; but the universal silence which reigned in the rooms warned Louis, so sensitively particular with regard to good breeding, that his delight might give rise to various interpretations. He turned aside and put the note in his pocket, and then advancing a few steps, which brought him again to the threshold of the door near his guests, said, "M. du Vallon, I have seen you to-day with the greatest pleasure, and my pleasure will be equally great to see you again." Porthos bowed as the Colossus of Rhodes might have done, and retired from the room with his face towards the king. "M. d'Artagnan," continued the king, "you will await my orders in the gallery; I am obliged to you for having made me acquainted with M. du Vallon. Messieurs," addressing himself to the other guests, "I return to Paris to-morrow, on account of the departure of the Spanish and Dutch ambassadors. Until to-morrow, then!"

The apartment was immediately cleared of the guests. The king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, made him read La Vallière's verses over again, and said, "What do you think of them?"—"Charming, Sire."—"They charm me, in fact; and if they were known—"—"Oh! the professional poets would be jealous of them; but they will never know them."

"Did you give her mine?"—"Oh, Sire, she positively devoured them!"—"They were very weak, I am afraid."—"That is not what Mademoiselle de la Vallière said of them."—

"Do you think that she was pleased with them?"—"I am sure of it, Sire."

"I must answer, then."—"Oh, Sire, immediately after supper? Your Majesty will fatigue yourself."—"I believe that you are right; study after eating is very injurious."—"The labour of a poet especially so; and besides, at this moment great excitement prevails at Mademoiselle de la Vallière's."

"What do you mean?"—"With her, as with all the other ladies of the court."—"Why?"—"On account of poor De Guiche's accident."—"Has anything serious happened to De Guiche, then?"—"Yes, Sire, he has one hand nearly destroyed, and a hole in his breast; in fact, he is dying."

"Good heavens! who told you that?"—"Manicamp brought him back just now to the house of a doctor here in Fontainebleau, and the rumour soon reached us all here."—"Brought back! Poor De Guiche; and how did it happen?"—"Ah, Sire, that is the very question,—how did it happen?"—"You say that in a very singular manner, De Saint-Aignan. Give me the details. What does he himself say?"

"He says nothing, Sire; but others do."—"What others?"—"Those who brought him back, Sire."—"Who are they?"—"I do not know, Sire; but M. de Manicamp knows. M. de Manicamp is one of his friends."—"As everybody is, indeed," said the king.—"Oh, no," returned De Saint-Aignan, "you are mistaken, Sire; every one is not precisely a friend of M. de Guiche."

"How do you know that?"—"Does your Majesty require me to explain myself?"—"Certainly I do."—"Well, Sire, I believe I have heard something said about a quarrel between two gentlemen."—"When?"—"This very evening, before your Majesty's supper was served."—"That can hardly be. I have issued such stringent and severe ordinances with respect to duelling, that no one, I presume, would dare to disobey them."—"In that case Heaven preserve me from excusing any one!" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan. "Your Majesty commanded me to speak, and I speak."

"Tell me, then, in what way the Comte de Guiche has been wounded?"—"Sire, it is said to have been at a boar-hunt."—"This evening?"—"Yes, Sire."—"One of his hands shattered, and a hole in his breast! Who was at the hunt with M. de Guiche?"—"I do not know, Sire; but M. de Manicamp knows, or ought to know."—"You are concealing something from me, De Saint-Aignan."—"Nothing, Sire, I assure you."

"Then explain to me how the accident happened; was it a musket that burst?"—"Very likely, Sire. But yet, on reflection, it could hardly have been that, for De Guiche's pistol was found close by him still loaded."—"His pistol? But a man does not go to a boar-hunt with a pistol."—"Sire, it is also said that De Guiche's horse was killed, and that the horse's body is still to be found in the clearing."—"His horse? De Guiche go on horseback to a boar-hunt! De Saint-Aignan, I do not understand a thing of what you have been telling me. Where did the affair happen?"—"At the circle, in the Rochin woods."

"That will do. Call M. d'Artagnan!" De Saint-Aignan obeyed, and the musketeer entered. "M. d'Artagnan," said the king, "you will leave this place by the little door of the private staircase."—"Yes, Sire."—"You will mount your horse."—"Yes, Sire."—"And you will proceed to the circle of the Rochin woods. Do you know the spot?"—"Yes, Sire. I have fought there twice."—"What!" exclaimed the king, amazed at the reply.—"Under the edicts, Sire, of Cardinal Richelieu," returned D'Artagnan, with his usual impassibility.

"That is very different, Monsieur. You will therefore go there, and examine the locality very carefully. A man has been wounded there, and you will find a horse lying dead. You will tell me what your opinion is upon the whole affair."—"Very good, Sire."—"Of course it is your own opinion I wish to have, and not that of any one else."—"You shall have it in an hour's time, Sire."—"I prohibit your speaking with any one, whoever he may be."—"Except with the person who must give me a lantern," said D'Artagnan.—"Oh, that is a matter of course!" said the king, laughing at the liberty which he tolerated in no one but his captain of musketeers.

D'Artagnan left by the little staircase. "Now, let my physician be sent for," said Louis. Ten minutes afterwards the king's physician arrived, quite out of breath. "You will go, Monsieur," said the king to him, "with M. de Saint-Aignan wherever he may take you; you will render me an account of the condition of the patient you may see in the house to which you will be taken." The physician obeyed without a remark, as at that time people were beginning to obey Louis XIV., and left the room preceding De Saint-Aignan.

"Do you, De Saint-Aignan, send Manicamp to me before the physician can possibly have spoken to him;" and De Saint-Aignan left in his turn.

CHAPTER CLV

HOW D'ARTAGNAN DISCHARGED THE MISSION WITH WHICH THE KING HAD ENTRUSTED HIM

WHILE the king was engaged in making these last-mentioned arrangements in order to ascertain the truth, D'Artagnan, without losing a second, ran to the stable, took down the lantern, saddled his horse himself, and proceeded towards the place which his Majesty had indicated. According to the promise he had made, he had neither seen nor met any one; and as we have observed, he had carried his scruples so far as to do without the assistance of the helpers in the stables altogether. D'Artagnan was one of those who in moments of difficulty pride themselves on increasing their own value. By dint of hard galloping, he in less than five minutes reached the wood, fastened his horse to the first tree he came to, and went into the broad open space on foot. He then began to inspect most carefully, on foot and with his lantern in his hand, the whole surface of the circle,—went forward, turned back again, measured, examined, —and after half an hour's minute inspection returned silently to his horse, and pursued his way in deep reflection and at a foot-pace to Fontainebleau. Louis was waiting in his cabinet: he was alone, and with a pencil was scribbling on paper certain lines which D'Artagnan at the first glance recognised as being very unequal and very much scratched up. He concluded that they must be verses. The king raised his head and perceived D'Artagnan. "Well, Monsieur," he said, "do you bring me any news?"—"Yes, Sire."—"What have you seen?"—"So far as probability goes, Sire—" D'Artagnan began to reply.—"It was certainty I requested of you."—"I will approach that as nearly as I possibly can. The weather was very well adapted for investigations of the character which I have just made; it has been raining this evening, and the roads are wet and muddy—"

"Well, the result, M. d'Artagnan?"—"Sire, your Majesty told me that there was a horse lying dead in the cross-road of the Rochin woods, and I began, therefore, by studying the roads. I say the roads, because the centre of the circle is reached by four separate roads. The one that I myself took was the only one that presented any fresh tracks. Two horses had followed it side by side; their eight feet were marked very

distinctly in the clay. One of the riders was more impatient than the other, for the footprints of the one were invariably in advance of the other by about half a horse's length."—"Are you quite sure they came together?" said the king.—"Yes, Sire. The horses are two rather large animals of equal pace,—horses well used to manœuvres of all kinds, for they wheeled round the barrier of the circle together."

"What next, Monsieur?"—"The two riders paused there for a minute, no doubt to arrange the conditions of the engagement; the horses grew restless and impatient. One of the riders spoke, while the other listened and seemed to have contented himself by simply answering. His horse pawed the ground, which proves that his attention was so taken up by listening that he let the bridle fall from his hand."—"A hostile meeting did take place, then?"—"Undoubtedly."—"Continue! You are a most accurate observer."—"One of the two cavaliers remained where he was standing,—the one, in fact, who had been listening; the other crossed the open space and at first placed himself directly opposite to his adversary. Then the one who had remained stationary crossed the circle at a gallop, about two-thirds of its length, thinking that he was riding upon his opponent; but the latter had followed the circumference of the wood."

"You are ignorant of their names, I suppose?"—"Completely so, Sire. Only he who followed the circumference of the wood was mounted on a black horse."—"How do you know that?"—"I found a few hairs of his tail among the brambles which bordered the sides of the ditch."—"Go on!"—"As for the other horse, there can be no trouble in describing him, since he was left dead on the field of battle."

"What was the cause of his death?"—"A ball which had passed through his temple."—"Was the ball that of a pistol or of a gun?"—"It was a pistol-bullet, Sire. Besides, the manner in which the horse was wounded explained to me the tactics of the man who had killed it. He had followed the circumference of the wood in order to take his adversary on the flank. Moreover, I followed his foot-tracks on the grass."—"The tracks of the black horse, do you mean?"—"Yes, Sire."—"Go on, M. d'Artagnan!"

"As your Majesty now perceives the position of the two adversaries, I will, for a moment, leave the cavalier who had remained stationary for the one who started off at a gallop."—"Do so."—"The horse of the cavalier who charged was killed

on the spot."—"How do you know that?"—"The cavalier had not time even to throw himself off his horse, and so fell with it. I observed the impression of his leg, which with a great effort he was enabled to extricate from under the horse. The spur, pressed down by the weight of the animal, had ploughed up the ground."

"Very good; and what did he do when he got up again?"—"He walked straight up to his adversary."—"Who still remained upon the verge of the wood?"—"Yes, Sire. Then, having reached a favourable distance, he stopped firmly,—for the impression of both his heels are left in the ground quite close to each other,—fired, and missed his adversary."—"How do you know that he did not hit him?"—"I found a hat with a ball through it."—"Ah, a proof, then!" exclaimed the king. —"Insufficient, Sire," replied D'Artagnan, coldly. "It is a hat without any letters indicating its ownership, without arms; it has a red feather, as all hats have; the lace, even, had nothing to distinguish it."

"Did the man with the hat through which the bullet had passed fire a second time?"—"Oh, Sire, he had already fired twice."—"How did you ascertain that?"—"I found the waddings of the pistol."—"And what became of the bullet which did not kill the horse?"—"It cut in two the feather of the hat belonging to him against whom it was directed, and broke a small birch at the other end of the clearing."

"In that case, then, the man on the black horse was disarmed, while his adversary had still one more shot to fire."—"Sire, while the dismounted rider was getting up, the other was reloading his pistol. Only, he was much agitated while he was loading it, and his hand trembled greatly."—"How do you know that?"—"Half the charge fell to the ground; and he threw the ramrod aside, not having time to replace it in the pistol."

"M. d'Artagnan, what you tell me is marvellous."—"It is only close observation, Sire, and the commonest scout would do as much."—"The whole scene is before me from the manner in which you relate it."—"I have, in fact, reconstructed it in my own mind, with merely a few alterations."

"And now," said the king, "let us return to the dismounted cavalier. You were saying that he had walked up to his adversary while the latter was reloading his pistol."—"Yes; but at the very moment he himself was taking aim, the other fired."—"Oh!" said the king; "and the shot?"—"The shot told

terribly, Sire; the dismounted cavalier fell upon his face, after having staggered forward three or four paces."—"Where was he hit?"—"In two places,—in the first place, in his right hand, and then, by the same bullet, in his chest."

"But how could you ascertain that?" inquired the king, full of admiration.—"By a very simple means: the butt-end of the pistol was covered with blood, and the trace of the bullet could be observed with fragments of a broken ring. The wounded man, in all probability, had the ring-finger and the little finger carried away."—"So far as the hand goes, I have nothing to say; but the chest!"—"Sire, there were two small pools of blood, at a distance of about two feet and a half from each other. At one of these pools of blood the grass was torn up by the clinched hand; at the other the grass was simply pressed down by the weight of the body."—"Poor De Guiche!" exclaimed the king.

"Ah! it was M. de Guiche, then?" said the musketeer, very quietly. "I suspected it, but did not venture to mention it to your Majesty."—"And what made you suspect it?"—"I recognised the De Grammont arms upon the holsters of the dead horse."—"And you think that he is seriously wounded?"—"Very seriously, since he fell immediately, and remained a long time in the same place; however, he was able to walk, as he left the spot supported by two friends."—"You met him returning, then?"—"No; but I observed the footprints of three men. The one on the right and the one on the left walked freely and easily, but the one in the middle dragged his feet as he walked; besides, he left traces of blood at every step he took."

"Now, Monsieur, since you saw the combat so distinctly that not a single detail seems to have escaped you, tell me something about De Guiche's adversary."—"Oh, Sire, I do not know him."—"And yet you see everything so clearly."—"Yes, Sire," said D'Artagnan, "I see everything, but I do not tell all I see; and since the poor devil has escaped, your Majesty will permit me to say that I do not intend to denounce him."—"And yet he is guilty, since he has fought a duel, Monsieur."—"Not guilty in my eyes, Sire," said D'Artagnan, coldly.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the king, "are you aware of what you are saying?"—"Perfectly, Sire; but, according to my notion, a man who fights well is a brave man;—such, at least, is my own opinion. But your Majesty may have another; that is very natural,—you are the master here."—"M. d'Artagnan,

I ordered you, however—" D'Artagnan interrupted the king by a respectful gesture. "You ordered me, Sire, to gather what particulars I could respecting a hostile meeting that had taken place; those particulars you have. If you order me to arrest M. de Guiche's adversary, I will obey; but do not order me to denounce him to you, for in that case I will not obey."—"Very well! Arrest him, then!"

"Give me his name, Sire." The king stamped his foot angrily; but after a moment's reflection he said, "You are right,—ten times, twenty times, a hundred times right."—"That is my opinion, Sire; I am happy that at the same time it accords with your Majesty's."

"One word more. Who carried assistance to De Guiche?"—"I do not know."—"But you speak of two men. There was a second, then."—"There was no second. Nay, more than that, when M. de Guiche fell his adversary fled without even giving him any assistance."—"The miserable coward!"—"The consequence of your ordinances, Sire. If a man has fought well and fairly, and has already escaped one chance of death, he naturally wishes to escape a second. M. de Boutteville cannot be forgotten very easily."—"And so men turn cowards."—"No; they become prudent."

"And he has fled, then, you say?"—"Yes; and as fast as his horse could possibly carry him."—"In what direction?"—"In the direction of the château."—"What then?"—"Afterwards, as I have had the honour of telling your Majesty, two men on foot arrived, who carried M. de Guiche back with them."—"What proof have you that these men arrived after the combat?"—"A very evident proof, Sire. At the moment the encounter took place the rain had just ceased; the ground had not had time to absorb the moisture, and had consequently become damp; the footsteps sank in: but after the combat, while M. de Guiche was lying there in a fainting condition, the ground became firm again, and the footsteps made a less sensible impression."

Louis clapped his hands together in sign of admiration. "M. d'Artagnan," he said, "you are positively the cleverest man in my kingdom."—"The very thing that M. de Richelieu thought, and M. de Mazarin said, Sire."—"And now it remains for us to see whether your sagacity is in fault."—"Oh, Sire, a man may be mistaken; *errare humanum est*," said the musketeer, philosophically.—"In that case you are not human, M. d'Artagnan, for I believe you never are mistaken."

"Your Majesty said that we were going to see."—"Yes."—"In what way may I venture to ask?"—"I have sent for M. de Manicamp, and M. de Manicamp is coming."—"And M. de Manicamp knows the secret?"—"De Guiche keeps no secrets from M. de Manicamp." D'Artagnan shook his head. "No one was present at the combat, I repeat; and unless M. de Manicamp was one of the two men who brought him back—"

"Hush!" said the king, "here he is coming; remain there and listen attentively."—"Very good, Sire," said the musketeer. And at the same moment Manicamp and De Saint-Aignan appeared at the threshold of the door.

CHAPTER CLVI

THE ENCOUNTER

THE king made, first to the musketeer and then to De Saint-Aignan, an imperious and significant gesture, as much as to say, "On your lives, not a word!" D'Artagnan withdrew, like a soldier, into a corner of the room; De Saint-Aignan, in his character of favourite, leaned over the back of the king's chair. Manicamp, with his right foot properly advanced, a smile upon his lips, and his white and well-formed hands gracefully disposed, advanced to make his reverence to the king, who returned the salutation by a bow. "Good-evening, M. de Manicamp," he said.

"Your Majesty did me the honour to send for me," said Manicamp.—"Yes, in order to learn from you all the details of the unfortunate accident which has befallen the Comte de Guiche."—"Oh, Sire! it is very grievous indeed."—"You were there?"—"Not precisely so, Sire."—"But you arrived on the scene where the accident occurred a few minutes after it took place?"—"I did so, Sire, about half an hour afterwards."—"And where did the accident take place?"—"I believe, Sire, the place is called the circle of the Rochin woods."—"Oh! the rendezvous of the hunt."—"The very spot, Sire."

"Well, tell me what you know of the details of this unhappy affair, M. de Manicamp."—"Perhaps your Majesty has already been informed of them, and I fear to fatigue you by useless repetitions."—"No; do not be afraid of that!" Manicamp looked all around him. He saw only D'Artagnan leaning with his back against the wainscot,—D'Artagnan, calm, kind, and

good-natured as usual,—and De Saint-Aignan, with whom he had come, and who still leaned over the king's arm-chair with an expression of countenance equally full of good feeling. He determined, therefore, to speak out. "Your Majesty is perfectly aware," he said, "that accidents are very frequent in hunting."

"In hunting, do you say?"—"Yes, Sire, I mean when an animal is brought to bay."—"Ah!" said the king, "it was when the animal was brought to bay, then, that the accident happened."—"Why, yes, Sire," ventured Manicamp; "was your Majesty not aware of that?"—"I heard something like that," said the king, hastily, for Louis XIV. was averse to lying; "it was, then, when the animal was at bay, you say, that the accident happened?"—"Alas! Sire, unhappily, it was so."

The king paused for a moment before he inquired. "What animal was being hunted?"—"A wild boar, Sire."—"And what could possibly have possessed De Guiche to go to a wild-boar hunt by himself? That is but a clownish idea of sport, and fit only for that class of people who unlike the Maréchal de Grammont have no dogs and huntsmen to hunt as gentlemen should do." Manicamp shrugged his shoulders. "Youth is very rash," he said sententiously.

"Well, go on!" said the king.—"At all events," continued Manicamp, not venturing to be too precipitate and hasty, and letting his words fall very slowly, one by one, just as a fen-man takes his steps in a marsh,—"at all events, Sire, poor De Guiche went hunting,—quite alone."—"Quite alone, indeed! What a sportsman! And is not M. de Guiche aware that the wild boar always stands at bay?"—"That is the very thing which really happened, Sire."—"He had some idea, then, that the beast was there?"—"Yes, Sire; some peasants had seen it among their potatoes."—"And what kind of an animal was it?"—"A short, thick beast."

"You may as well tell me, Monsieur, that De Guiche had some idea of committing suicide, for I have seen him hunt, and he is a very expert hunter. Whenever he fires at an animal brought to bay and held in check by the dogs, he takes every possible precaution, and he fires with a carbine; and on this occasion he seems to have faced the boar with pistols only." Manicamp started. "A costly pair of pistols, excellent weapons to fight a duel with a man and not with a wild boar! What absurdity!"—"There are some things, Sire, which are difficult of explanation."—"You are quite right, and the event which we are now discussing is one of those things. Go on!"

During the recital De Saint-Aignan, who perhaps would have made a sign to Manicamp to be careful what he was about, was held in check by the persistent watchfulness of the king; so that it was utterly impossible to communicate with Manicamp in any way. As for D'Artagnan, the statue of Silence at Athens was far more noisy and far more expressive than he. Manicamp, therefore, was obliged to continue in the same way in which he had begun, and so contrived to get more and more entangled in his explanation. "Sire," he said, "this is probably how the affair happened: De Guiche was waiting to receive the boar as it rushed towards him."—"On foot or on horseback?" inquired the king.—"On horseback. He fired upon the brute and missed his aim, and then it dashed upon him."—"And the horse was killed."—"Ah! your Majesty knows that, then."—"I have been told that a horse has been found lying dead in the cross-roads of the Rochin woods, and I presumed it was De Guiche's horse."—"It was his, indeed, Sire."

"Well, so much for the horse, and now for De Guiche."—"De Guiche, once down, was attacked and worried by the wild boar, and wounded in the hand and in the chest."—"It is a horrible accident, but it must be admitted that it was De Guiche's own fault. How could he possibly have gone to hunt such an animal merely armed with pistols? He must have forgotten the fable of Adonis."

Manicamp rubbed his ear in seeming perplexity. "Very true," he said; "it was very imprudent."—"Can you explain it, M. Manicamp?"—"Sire, what is written is written!"—"Ah! you are a fatalist."

Manicamp looked very uncomfortable and ill at ease. "I am angry with you, M. Manicamp," continued the king.—"With me, Sire?"—"Yes. How was it that you, who are De Guiche's intimate friend, and who know that he is subject to such acts of folly, did not stop him in time?" Manicamp hardly knew what to do; the tone in which the king spoke was not exactly that of a credulous man. On the other hand, the tone did not indicate any particular severity, nor did it have the insistence of a cross-examination. There was more of raillery in it than of menace.

"And you say, then," continued the king, "that it was positively Guiche's horse that was found dead?"—"Quite positive, Sire."—"Did that astonish you?"—"No, Sire; for your Majesty will remember that at the last hunt M. de Saint-Maure had a horse killed under him, and in the same way."—

"Yes, but that one was ripped open."—"Of course, Sire."—"Had Guiche's horse been ripped open like M. de Saint-Maure's horse, that would not have astonished me, indeed." Manicamp opened his eyes very wide. "But what astonishes me," continued the king, "is that Guiche's horse, instead of having its belly ripped open, had its skull broken."

Manicamp was in great confusion. "Am I mistaken?" resumed the king; "was it not in the temple that Guiche's horse was struck? You must admit, M. de Manicamp, that that is a very singular wound."—"You are aware, Sire, that the horse is a very intelligent animal, and he endeavoured to defend himself."—"But a horse defends himself with his hind feet, and not with his head."—"In that case the terrified horse might have been knocked down," said Manicamp; "and the boar, you understand, Sire, the boar—"

"Oh, I understand that perfectly, so far as the horse is concerned; but how about his rider?"—"Well, that, too, is simple enough. The boar left the horse and attacked the rider, and, as I have already had the honour of informing your Majesty, shattered De Guiche's hand at the very moment he was about to discharge his second pistol at him, and then, with a blow of his tusk, made that terrible hole in his chest."—"Nothing can possibly be more likely; really, M. de Manicamp, you are wrong in placing so little confidence in your own eloquence, and you can tell a story most admirably."—"Your Majesty is exceedingly kind," said Manicamp, bowing in the most embarrassed manner.

"From this day henceforth, I shall prohibit any gentleman attached to my court from going to a similar encounter. Really, one might just as well permit duelling." Manicamp started, and moved as if he were about to withdraw. "Is your Majesty satisfied?" he inquired.—"Delighted; but do not withdraw yet, M. de Manicamp," said Louis,—"I have business with you."

"Well, well!" thought D'Artagnan, "there is another who is not up to our mark;" and he uttered a sigh which might signify, "Oh! the men of our stamp, where are they now?"

At this moment an usher lifted the curtain before the door, and announced the king's physician. "Ah!" exclaimed Louis, "here comes M. Valot, who has just been to see M. de Guiche. We shall now hear news of the wounded man." Manicamp felt more uncomfortable than ever. "In this way, at least," added the king, "our conscience will be quite clear;" and he looked at D'Artagnan, who did not seem in the slightest degree discomposed.

CHAPTER CLVII

THE PHYSICIAN

M. VALOT entered. The position of the different persons present was precisely the same,—the king was seated, De Saint-Aignan was still leaning over the back of his arm-chair, D'Artagnan stood with his back against the wall, and Manicamp was still standing.

"Well, M. Valot," said the king, "have you obeyed my directions?"—"With the greatest alacrity, Sire."—"You went to your colleague's house in Fontainebleau?"—"Yes, Sire."—"And you found M. de Guiche there?"—"I did, Sire."—"What state was he in? Speak unreservedly."—"In a very sad state, indeed, Sire."

"The wild boar did not quite devour him, however?"—"Devour whom?"—"Guiche."—"What wild boar?"—"The boar that wounded him."—"M. de Guiche wounded by a boar?"—"So it is said, at least."—"By a poacher, rather, or by a jealous husband or an ill-used lover, who in order to be revenged fired upon him."

"What is that you say, M. Valot? Were not M. de Guiche's wounds produced by defending himself against a wild boar?"—"M. de Guiche's wounds were produced by a pistol-bullet which broke his ring-finger and the little finger of the right hand, and afterwards buried itself in the intercostal muscles of the chest."

"A bullet! Are you sure M. de Guiche has been wounded by a bullet?" exclaimed the king, pretending to look much surprised.—"Indeed I am, Sire," said Valot,—"so sure, in fact, that here it is;" and he presented to the king a half-flattened bullet, which the king looked at, but did not touch. "Did he have that in his chest, poor fellow?" he asked.

"Not precisely. The ball did not penetrate, but was flattened, as you see, either upon the guard of the pistol or upon the right side of the breast-bone."—"Good heavens!" said the king, seriously; "you said nothing to me about all this, M. de Manicamp."—"Sire—"—"What does all this mean, then,—this invention about hunting a wild boar at nightfall? Come, speak, Monsieur!"—"Ah! Sire—"

"It seems, then, that you are right," said the king, turning

round towards his captain of musketeers, "and that a duel actually took place." The king possessed, to a greater extent than any one else, the faculty, enjoyed by the great in power or position, of compromising and estranging those beneath him. Manicamp darted a reproachful look at the musketeer.

D'Artagnan understood the look at once, and, not wishing to remain beneath the weight of such an accusation, advanced a step forward, and said: "Sire, your Majesty commanded me to go and explore the place where the cross-roads meet in the Rochin woods, and to report to you, according to my own ideas, what had taken place there. I submitted my observations to you, but without denouncing any one. It was your Majesty yourself who was the first to name M. le Comte de Guiche."—"Well, Monsieur, well," said the king, haughtily, "you have done your duty, and I am satisfied with you; that ought to be sufficient for you. But you, M. de Manicamp, have failed in yours, for you have told me a falsehood."

"A falsehood, Sire! The expression is a hard one."—"Find another instead, then."—"Sire, I will not attempt to do so. I have already been unfortunate enough to displease your Majesty, and it will in every respect be far better for me to accept most humbly any reproaches you may think proper to address to me."—"You are right, Monsieur; whoever conceals the truth from me risks my displeasure."—"Sometimes, Sire, one is ignorant of the truth."—"No further falsehood, Monsieur, or I double the punishment."

Manicamp bowed and turned pale. D'Artagnan again made another step forward, determined to interfere, if the still increasing anger of the king attained certain limits. "You see, Monsieur," continued the king, "that it is useless to deny the thing any longer. M. de Guiche has fought a duel."—"I do not deny it, Sire; and it would have been generous in your Majesty not to have forced a gentleman to tell a falsehood."—"Forced! Who forced you?"—"Sire, M. de Guiche is my friend; your Majesty has forbidden duels under pain of death; a falsehood might save my friend's life, and I told it."

"Good!" murmured D'Artagnan; "an excellent fellow, upon my word!"—"Instead of telling a falsehood, Monsieur, you should have prevented him from fighting," said the king.—"Oh, Sire, your Majesty, who is the most accomplished gentleman in France, knows quite as well as any one that we have never considered M. de Boutteville dishonoured for having suffered death on the Place de Grève. That which does dis-

honour a man is not meeting his executioner but avoiding his enemy."

"Well, Monsieur, that may be so," said Louis XIV.; "I am very desirous of suggesting a means of your making amends for everything."—"If it be a means of which a gentleman may avail himself, I shall most eagerly do so, Sire."—"The name of M. de Guiche's adversary?"

"Oh!" murmured D'Artagnan, "are we going to take Louis XIII. as a model?"—"Sire!" said Manicamp, with an accent of reproach.—"You will not name him, it appears, then?" said the king.—"Sire, I do not know him."—"Bravo!" murmured D'Artagnan.

"M. de Manicamp, hand your sword to the captain." Manicamp bowed very gracefully, unbuckled his sword, smiling as he did so, and handed it to the musketeer to take. But De Saint-Aignan advanced hurriedly between him and D'Artagnan. "Sire," he said, "will your Majesty permit me to say a word?"—"Do so," said the king, delighted perhaps at the bottom of his heart to have some one step between him and the wrath which he felt had carried him too far.

"Manicamp, you are a brave man, and the king will appreciate your conduct; but to wish to serve your friends too well, is to destroy them. Manicamp, you know the name the king asks you for?"—"It is perfectly true; I do know it."—"You will tell it, then?"—"If I felt that I ought to have told it, I should have already done so."—"Then I will tell it, for I am not so extremely sensitive on such points of honour as you are."—"You are at liberty to do so; but it seems to me, however—"—"Oh, a truce to magnanimity! I will not permit you to go to the Bastille in that way. Do you speak; or I will."

Manicamp was keen-witted enough, and perfectly understood that he had done quite sufficient to produce a good opinion of his conduct; it was now only a question of persevering in such a manner as to regain the good graces of the king. "Speak, Monsieur!" he said to De Saint-Aignan. "I have on my own behalf done all that my conscience told me to do, and it must have been very importunate," he added, turning towards the king, "since its dictates led me to disobey your Majesty's commands; but your Majesty will forgive me, I hope, when you learn that I was anxious to preserve the honour of a lady."—"Of a lady?" asked the king, with some uneasiness.—"Yes, Sire."—"A lady was the cause of this duel?" Manicamp bowed. The king rose and approached Manicamp. "If the

position of the lady in question warrants it," he said, "I shall not complain of your having acted with so much circumspection; quite the contrary, indeed."

"Sire, everything which concerns your Majesty's household or the household of your Majesty's brother, is of importance in my eyes."—"My brother's household?" repeated Louis XIV., with a slight hesitation. "The cause of this duel was a lady belonging to my brother's household, do you say?"—"Or to Madame's."—"Ah! to Madame's?"—"Yes, Sire."—"Well—and this lady?"—"Is one of the maids of honour of the household of her royal highness Madame la Duchesse d'Orléans."—"For whom M. de Guiche fought, do you say?"—"Yes, Sire; and this time I tell no falsehood."

Louis seemed restless and anxious. "Messieurs," he said, turning towards the spectators of this scene, "will you have the goodness to retire for a moment? I wish to be alone with M. de Manicamp. I know he has some very important communications to make for his own justification, and that he will not venture to give them before witnesses. Put up your sword, M. de Manicamp!"

Manicamp returned his sword to his belt. "The fellow decidedly has his wits about him," murmured the musketeer, taking Saint-Aignan by the arm and withdrawing with him.—"He will get out of it," said the latter in D'Artagnan's ear.—"And with honour, too, Count." Manicamp cast a glance of acknowledgment at Saint-Aignan and the captain, which passed unnoticed by the king. "Well, well," said D'Artagnan, as he crossed the threshold, "I had an indifferent opinion of the new generation. Indeed, I was mistaken, after all, and these young fellows have some good in them." Valot preceded the favourite and the captain, leaving the king and Manicamp alone in the cabinet.

CHAPTER CLVIII

WHEREIN D'ARTAGNAN PERCEIVES THAT IT WAS HE WHO WAS MISTAKEN, AND MANICAMP WHO WAS RIGHT

The king, determined to be satisfied that no one was listening, went himself to the door, and then returned quickly and placed himself opposite to Manicamp. "And now that we are alone, M. de Manicamp, explain yourself!"—"With the greatest frankness, Sire," replied the young man.

"And in the first place, pray understand," added the king, "that there is nothing to which I personally attach greater importance than the honour of any lady."—"That is the very reason, Sire, why I endeavoured to study your delicacy of feeling."—"Yes, I understand it all now. You say that it was one of my sister-in-law's maids of honour who was the subject of dispute, and that the person in question, Guiche's adversary, the man, in fact, whom you will not name—"—"But whom M. de Saint-Aignan will name, Sire."

"Yes; you say, however, that this man has offended some one belonging to the household of Madame."—"Yes, Sire, Mademoiselle de la Vallière."—"Ah!" said the king, as if he had expected the name, and yet as if its announcement had caused him a sudden pang,—"ah! it was Mademoiselle de la Vallière who was insulted."—"I do not say precisely that she was insulted, Sire."—"But at all events—"—"I merely say that she was spoken of in terms far from respectful."

"A man dares to speak in disrespectful terms of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and yet you refuse to tell me the name of the insulter!"—"Sire, I thought it was quite understood that your Majesty had abandoned the idea of making me denounce him."—"Perfectly true, you are right," returned the king, controlling his anger; "besides, I shall know in sufficient time the name of the man whom I shall feel it my duty to punish." Manicamp perceived that they had returned to the question again. As for the king, he saw that he had allowed himself to be carried a little too far, and he therefore continued: "And I will punish him, not because there is any question of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, although I esteem her very highly, but because a lady was the object of the quarrel. And I intend that ladies shall be respected at my court, and that quarrels shall be put a stop to altogether." Manicamp bowed.

"And now, M. de Manicamp," continued the king, "what was said about Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"—"Cannot your Majesty guess?"—"I?"—"Your Majesty can imagine the character of the jests in which young men permit themselves to indulge."—"They very probably said that she was in love with some one?" the king ventured to remark.

"Probably so."—"But Mademoiselle de la Vallière has a perfect right to love any one she pleases," said the king.

"That is the very point De Guiche maintained."—"And was it for that reason he fought?"—"Yes, Sire, for that reason alone." The king coloured. "And you do not know anything

more, then?"—"In what respect, Sire?"—"In the very interesting respect to which you just now referred."—"What does your Majesty wish to know?"—"Well, for instance, the name of the man with whom La Vallière is in love, and whom De Guiche's adversary disputed her right to love."—"Sire, I know nothing—I have heard nothing—and have learned nothing, even accidentally; but De Guiche is a noble-hearted fellow, and if momentarily he substituted himself in the place of La Vallière's protector, it was because that protector was of too exalted a position to undertake her defence himself."

These words were more than transparent; they made the king blush, but this time with pleasure. He struck Manicamp gently on the shoulder. "Well, well, M. de Manicamp, you are not only a keen-witted fellow, but a brave gentleman besides, and your friend De Guiche is a paladin quite after my own heart; you will express that to him, will you not?"—"Your Majesty forgives me, then?"—"Completely."—"And I am free?"

The king smiled and held out his hand to Manicamp, which he took and kissed respectfully. "And then," added the king, "you relate stories so charmingly."—"I, Sire!"—"You told me in the most admirable manner the particulars of the accident which happened to De Guiche. I can see the wild boar rushing out of the wood,—I can see the horse fall down, and the boar rush from the horse to the rider. You do not simply relate a story well, Monsieur, but you positively paint its incidents."

"Sire, I think that your Majesty deigns to laugh at my expense," said Manicamp.—"On the contrary," said Louis XIV. seriously, "I have so little intention of laughing, M. de Manicamp, that I wish you to relate this adventure to every one."—"The adventure of the hunt?"—"Yes; in the same manner in which you told it to me, without changing a single word, you understand."—"Perfectly, Sire."—"And you will relate it, then?"—"Without losing a minute."

"Very well; and now summon M. d'Artagnan; I hope you are no longer afraid of him."—"Oh, Sire, from the very moment when I am sure of your Majesty's kindness towards me, I no longer fear anything!"—"Call him, then!" said the king. Manicamp opened the door, and said, "Messieurs, the king summons you."

D'Artagnan, De Saint-Aignan, and Valot returned. "Messieurs," said the king, "I summoned you for the purpose of saying that M. de Manicamp's explanation has entirely satisfied

me." D'Artagnan glanced at Valot and De Saint-Aignan, as much as to say, "Well, did I not tell you so?"

The king led Manicamp aside to the door, and then in a low tone said, "See that M. de Guiche takes good care of himself, and particularly that he recovers as soon as possible. I am very desirous of thanking him in the name of every lady; but let him take special care that he does not begin again."—"Were he to die a hundred times, Sire, he would begin again if your Majesty's honour were in any way called in question."

This remark was direct enough. But we have already said that the incense of flattery was very pleasing to King Louis XIV., and provided he received it, he was not very particular as to its quality. "Very well, very well," he said, as he dismissed Manicamp, "I will see De Guiche myself, and make him listen to reason;" and as Manicamp retreated from the apartment, the king turned round towards the three spectators of this scene, and said, "Tell me, M. d'Artagnan, how does it happen that your sight is so imperfect?—you, whose eyes are generally so very good."

"My sight bad, Sire?"—"Certainly."—"It must be the case since your Majesty says so; but in what respect may I ask?"—"Why, with regard to what occurred in the Rochin woods."—"Ah!"

"Certainly. You pretend to have seen the tracks of two horses, to have detected the footprints of two men; and have described the particulars of an engagement which you assert took place. Nothing of the sort occurred,—pure illusion on your part."—"Ah!" said D'Artagnan again.—"Exactly the same thing with the galloping to and fro of the horses, and the other indications of a struggle. It was the struggle of De Guiche against the wild boar, and nothing else; only the struggle was a long and a terrible one, it seems."—"Ah!" continued D'Artagnan.—"And when I think that for a moment I almost believed such a mistake—but, then, you spoke with such confidence."

"In fact, Sire, I must have been very short-sighted," said D'Artagnan, with a readiness of humour which delighted the king.—"You do admit it, then?"—"Admit it, Sire! most assuredly I do."—"So that now you see the thing—"—"In quite a different light from what I saw it half an hour ago."—"And to what, then, do you attribute this difference in your opinion?"—"Oh, a very simple thing, Sire! Half an hour ago I returned from the Rochin wood, where I had nothing to

light me but a wretched stable-lantern—"—"While now—"—"While now I have all the wax lights of your cabinet, and more than that, your Majesty's own eyes, which illuminate everything, like the blazing sun at noonday."

The king began to laugh, and De Saint-Aignan broke out into convulsions of merriment. "It is precisely like M. Valot," said D'Artagnan, resuming the conversation where the king had left off; "he has been imagining all along that not only was M. de Guiche wounded by a bullet, but still more that he extracted a bullet, even, from his chest."—"Upon my word," said Valot, "I assure you—"

"Now, did you not believe that?" continued D'Artagnan.—"Yes," said Valot; "not only did I believe it, but at this very moment I would swear to it."—"Well, my dear doctor, you have dreamed it!"—"I have dreamed it!"—"M. de Guiche's wound, a mere dream; the bullet, a dream. So take my advice, and say no more about it."

"Well said," returned the king; "M. d'Artagnan's advice is very good. Do not speak of your dream to any one, M. Valot; and, upon the word of a gentleman, you will have no occasion to repent it. Good-evening, Messieurs; a very sad affair, indeed, is a wild-boar hunt!"—"A very serious thing, indeed," repeated D'Artagnan, in a loud voice, "is a wild-boar hunt!" and he repeated that remark in every room through which he passed, and left the château, taking Valot with him.

"And now that we are alone," said the king to De Saint-Aignan, "what is the name of De Guiche's adversary?" De Saint-Aignan looked at the king. "Oh, do not hesitate!" said the king; "you know that I must forgive."—"De Wardes," said De Saint-Aignan.—"Very good," said Louis XIV.; and then hastily retiring to his own room, he added to himself, "To forgive is not to forget."

CHAPTER CLIX

SHOWING THE ADVANTAGE OF HAVING TWO STRINGS TO ONE'S BOW

Manicamp quitted the king's apartment delighted at having succeeded so well, when, just as he reached the bottom of the staircase and was about passing before a doorway, he felt some one suddenly pull him by the sleeve. He turned and recognised

Montalais, who was waiting for him in the passage, and who in a very mysterious manner, with her body bent forward, and in a low tone of voice, said to him, "Monsieur, come quick, I pray you!"—"Where to, Mademoiselle?" inquired Manicamp.

"In the first place, a true knight would not have asked such a question, but would have followed without requiring any explanation."—"Well, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, "I am quite ready to conduct myself as a true knight."—"No, it is too late, and you cannot take the credit of it. We are going to Madame's apartments; so come at once."—"Ah!" said Manicamp; "lead on, then!" and he followed Montalais, who ran before him as lightly as Galatea.

"This time," said Manicamp, as he followed his guide, "I do not think that stories about hunting expeditions would be acceptable. We will try, however, and if need be—why, if need be, we must find something else." Montalais still ran on. "How fatiguing it is," thought Manicamp, "to have need of one's head and legs at the same time!"

At last, however, they arrived. Madame had just finished her toilet for the night, and was in a most elegant *déshabille;* but it must be understood that she had changed her dress before she had any idea of being subjected to the emotions which agitated her. She was waiting with the most restless impatience, and Montalais and Manicamp found her standing near the door. At the sound of their approaching footsteps Madame came forward to meet them. "Ah!" she said, "at last!"—"Here is M. Manicamp," replied Montalais.

Manicamp bowed with the greatest respect. Madame signed to Montalais to withdraw, and she immediately obeyed. Madame followed her with her eyes in silence until the door closed behind her, and then turning to Manicamp said, "What is the matter? And is it true, as I am told, M. de Manicamp, that some one is lying wounded in the château?"—"Yes, Madame, unfortunately so,—M. de Guiche."—"Yes, M. de Guiche," repeated the princess. "I had, in fact, heard it rumoured, but not confirmed. And so, in perfect truth, it is M. de Guiche who has met this misfortune?"—"M. de Guiche himself, Madame."

"Are you aware, M. de Manicamp," said the princess, hastily, "that the king has the strongest antipathy to duels?"—"Perfectly so, Madame; but a duel with a wild beast is not amenable to his Majesty."—"Oh, you will not insult me by supposing that I should credit the absurd fable which has been reported—with what object I cannot tell—respecting M. de Guiche's having

been wounded by a wild boar. No, no, Monsieur, the real truth is known; and at this moment, in addition to the inconvenience of his wound, M. de Guiche runs the risk of losing his liberty."

"Alas, Madame," said Manicamp, "I am well aware of that; but what is to be done?"—"You have seen his Majesty?"—"Yes, Madame."—"What did you say to him?"—"I told him how M. de Guiche had been to the chase, and how a wild boar had rushed forth out of the Rochin wood; how M. de Guiche fired at it, and how, in fact, the furious brute dashed at the hunter, killed his horse, and grievously wounded himself."—"And the king believed that?"—"Perfectly."

"Oh, you surprise me, M. de Manicamp; you surprise me very much!" and Madame walked up and down the room, casting a searching look from time to time at Manicamp, who remained motionless and impassive in the same position that he had taken on his entrance. At last she stopped. "And yet," she said, "every one here seems agreed in giving another cause for this wound."—"What cause, Madame?" said Manicamp; "may I be permitted, without indiscretion, to ask your Highness that question?"—"You ask that!—you, M. de Guiche's intimate friend, his confidant, indeed!"—"Oh Madame! the intimate friend—yes; the confidant—no. De Guiche is one of those men who can keep his own secrets,—who has some of his own, certainly, but who never breathes a syllable about them. De Guiche is discretion itself, Madame."

"Very well, then; those secrets which M. de Guiche keeps so scrupulously, I shall have the pleasure of acquainting you with," said the princess, spitefully. "For the king may possibly question you a second time; and if on the second occasion you were to repeat the same story that you told him at first, he possibly might not be very well satisfied with it."—"But, Madame, I think your Highness is mistaken with regard to the king. His Majesty has been perfectly satisfied with me I assure you."—"In that case, permit me to tell you, M. de Manicamp, it only shows that his Majesty is very easily satisfied."

"I think that your Highness is wrong in arriving at such an opinion; his Majesty is well known not to be contented except with very good reasons."—"And do you suppose that he will thank you for your officious falsehood, when he learns to-morrow that M. de Guiche had, on behalf of his friend M. de Bragelonne, a quarrel which ended in an hostile meeting?"—"A quarrel on M. de Bragelonne's account!" said Manicamp, with the most

innocent expression in the world; "what does your royal Highness do me the honour to tell me?"

"What is there astonishing in that? M. de Guiche is sensitive, irritable, and easily loses his temper."—"On the contrary, Madame, I consider M. de Guiche to be very patient, and never sensitive or irritable except upon very good grounds."—"But is not friendship a just ground?" said the princess.—"Oh, certainly, Madame; and particularly for a heart like his!"

"Very good; you will not deny, I suppose, that M. de Bragelonne is M. de Guiche's friend?"—"A very great friend."—"Well, then, M. de Guiche has taken M. de Bragelonne's part, and as M. de Bragelonne was absent and could not fight, he fought for him."

Manicamp began to smile, and moved his head and shoulders very slightly, as much as to say, "Oh, if you will positively have it so—"—"But speak, at all events," said the princess, out of patience; "speak!"—"I?"—"Of course; it is quite clear that you are not of my opinion, and that you have something to say."—"I have only one thing to say, Madame."—"Say it!"—"That I do not understand a single word of what you have just done me the honour of telling me."

"What! you do not understand a single word about M. de Guiche's quarrel with M. de Wardes!" exclaimed the princess, almost out of temper. Manicamp remained silent. "A quarrel," Madame continued, "which arose out of a conversation more or less scandalous in its tone and purport, and more or less well founded, respecting the virtue of a certain lady."

"Ah! of a certain lady,—that is quite another thing," said Manicamp.—"You begin to understand, do you not?"—"Your Highness will excuse me, but I dare not—"—"You dare not," said Madame, exasperated; "very well, then, wait one moment, and I will dare."—"Madame, Madame!" exclaimed Manicamp, as if in great dismay, "be careful of what you are going to say!"—"It would seem, Monsieur, that if I happened to be a man, you would challenge me, notwithstanding his Majesty's edicts, as M. de Guiche challenged M. de Wardes; and that, too, on account of the virtue of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Of Mademoiselle de la Vallière!" exclaimed Manicamp, starting backwards, as if hers were the very last name he expected to hear pronounced.—"What makes you start in that manner, M. de Manicamp?" said Madame, ironically; "do you mean to say that you would be impertinent enough to suspect that young lady's honour?"—"Madame, in the whole course

of this affair there has not been the slightest question of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's honour."

"What! when two men have almost blown each other's brains out on a woman's behalf, do you mean to say that she has had nothing to do with the affair, and that her name has not been called in question at all? I did not think you so good a courtier, M. de Manicamp."—"Pray forgive me, Madame," said the young man; "but we are very far from understanding each other. You do me the honour to speak one kind of language, while I, it seems, am speaking altogether another."—"I beg your pardon, but I do not understand your meaning."—"Forgive me, then; but I fancied I understood your Highness to remark that Messieurs de Guiche and de Wardes had fought on Mademoiselle de la Vallière's account."—"Certainly."—"On account of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I think you said?" repeated Manicamp.

"I do not say that M. de Guiche personally took an interest in Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I say that he did so as representing or acting on behalf of another."—"On behalf of another?"—"Come, do not always assume such a bewildered look! Does not every one here know that M. de Bragelonne is affianced to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and that before he went on the mission to London with which the king entrusted him, he charged his friend M. de Guiche to watch over that interesting young lady?"—"Ah! there is nothing more for me to say, then. Your Highness is well informed."—"Of everything; so I beg you to understand that clearly."

Manicamp began to laugh,—which almost exasperated the princess, who was not, as we know, of a very patient and enduring disposition. "Madame," resumed the discreet Manicamp, bowing to the princess, "let us bury this affair altogether in forgetfulness, for it will never be quite cleared up."—"Oh! so far as that goes there is nothing more to be done, and the information is complete. The king will learn that De Guiche has taken up the cause of this little adventuress, who gives herself all the airs of a grand lady; he will learn that M. de Bragelonne having nominated his friend M. de Guiche his guardian-in-ordinary of the garden of the Hesperides, the latter immediately fastened, as he was required to do, upon M. de Wardes, who ventured to touch the golden apple. Moreover, you cannot pretend to deny, M. de Manicamp,—you who know everything so well,—that the king, on his side, casts a longing eye upon this famous treasure, and that he very likely will bear

no slight grudge against M. de Guiche for constituting himself the defender of it. Are you sufficiently well informed now, or do you require anything further? If so, speak, Monsieur!"—"No, Madame, there is nothing more that I wish to know."

"Learn, however,—for you ought to know it, M. de Manicamp,—learn that his Majesty's indignation will be followed by terrible consequences. In princes of a similar temperament to that of his Majesty, the passion which jealousy causes sweeps down like a whirlwind."—"Which you will temper, Madame."—"I!" exclaimed the princess, with a gesture of indescribable irony,—"I! and by what right, may I ask?"—"Because you dislike injustice, Madame."—"And according to your account, then, it would be an injustice to prevent the king from arranging his love-affairs as he pleases."

"You will intercede, however, in M. de Guiche's favour?"—"You are mad, Monsieur," said the princess, in a haughty tone.—"On the contrary, Madame, I am in the most perfect possession of my senses; and, I repeat, you will defend M. de Guiche before the king."—"Why should I?"—"Because the cause of M. de Guiche is your own, Madame," said Manicamp in a low voice, with all the ardour with which his eyes were kindled.

"What do you mean?"—"I mean, Madame, that with respect to the defence which M. de Guiche undertook in M. de Bragelonne's absence, I am surprised that your Highness has not detected a pretext in La Vallière's name having been brought forward."—"A pretext—but a pretext for what?" repeated the princess, hesitatingly, for Manicamp's steady look had just revealed something of the truth to her.

"I trust, Madame," said the young man, "that I have now said sufficient to induce your Highness not to overwhelm before his Majesty my poor friend De Guiche, against whom all the malevolence of a party bitterly opposed to your own will now be directed."—"You mean, on the contrary, I suppose, that all those who have no great affection for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and even perhaps a few of those who have some regard for her, will be angry with the count?"

"Oh, Madame! why will you push your obstinacy so far, and refuse to open your ears and listen to the words of a devoted friend? Must I expose myself to the risk of your displeasure? Must I name, contrary to my own wish, the person who was the real cause of this quarrel?"—"The person?" said Madame, blushing.—"Must I," continued Manicamp, "tell you how poor De Guiche became irritated, furious, exasperated beyond

all control, at the different rumours which are circulating about this person? Must I, if you persist in this wilful blindness, and if respect should continue to prevent my naming her,—must I, I repeat, recall to your recollection the various scenes which Monsieur had with the Duke of Buckingham, and the insinuations which were let fall respecting the duke's departure? Must I remind you of the anxious care the count always took in his efforts to please, to watch, to protect that person for whom alone he lives, for whom alone he breathes? Well, I will do so; and when I shall have made you recall all that, you will perhaps understand how it happened that the count, at the end of his patience, and having been for some time past tormented by De Wardes, became, at the first disrespectful expression which the latter pronounced respecting the person in question, inflamed with passion, and panted for vengeance."

The princess concealed her face in her hands. "Monsieur, Monsieur!" she exclaimed; "do you know what you are saying, and to whom you are speaking?"—"Therefore, Madame," pursued Manicamp, as if he had not heard the exclamations of the princess, "nothing will astonish you any longer,—neither the count's ardour in seeking this quarrel, nor his wonderful address in transferring it to grounds foreign to your own personal interests. That latter circumstance was, indeed, a marvellous instance of tact and self-possession; and if the person in whose behalf the Comte de Guiche so fought and shed his blood does in reality owe some gratitude to the poor wounded sufferer, it is not indeed on account of the blood he has shed, or for the agony he has suffered, but for the steps he has taken to preserve from comment or reflection an honour which is more precious to him than his own."—"Oh!" cried Madame, as if she had been alone, "is it possible that the quarrel was on my account?"

Manicamp felt that he could now breathe for a moment, and gallantly had he won the right to do so. Madame, on her side, remained for some time plunged in a painful reverie. Her agitation could be seen by her panting bosom, by her languishing looks, by the frequency with which she pressed her hand upon her heart. But in her coquetry was not so much a passive quality; it was, on the contrary, a fire which sought for fuel to maintain itself, and which found what it required. "If it be as you assert," she said, "the count will have obliged two persons at the same time; for M. de Bragelonne also owes a deep debt of gratitude to M. de Guiche,—and with far greater reason, indeed, because everywhere and on every occasion

Mademoiselle de la Vallière will be regarded as having been defended by this generous champion."

Manicamp perceived that there still remained some lingering doubt in the princess's heart. "A truly admirable service, indeed," he said, "is the one he has rendered to Mademoiselle de la Vallière! A truly admirable service to M. de Bragelonne! The duel has created a sensation which in some respects casts a dishonourable suspicion upon that young girl,—a sensation which will of necessity embroil her with the viscount. The consequence is, that De Wardes's pistol-bullet has had three results instead of one,—it destroys at the same time the honour of a woman and the happiness of a man, and perhaps it has wounded to death one of the best gentlemen in France. Oh, Madame! your logic is very cold; it always condemns,—it never absolves."

Manicamp's concluding words scattered to the winds the last doubt which lingered, not in Madame's heart, but in her head. She was no longer a princess with her scruples, nor a woman with her returning suspicions; she was one whose heart had just felt the mortal chill of a wound "Wounded to death!" she murmured, in a faltering voice, "oh, M. de Manicamp! did you not say wounded to death?" Manicamp returned no other answer than a deep sigh. "And so you said that the count is dangerously wounded?" continued the princess.—"Yes, Madame; one of his hands is shattered, and he has a bullet lodged in his breast."—"Gracious heavens!" resumed the princess, with a feverish excitement, "this is horrible, M. de Manicamp! A hand shattered, do you say, and a bullet in his breast? And that coward, that wretch, that assassin, De Wardes, who did it! Heaven is unjust!"

Manicamp seemed overcome by violent emotion. He had, in fact, displayed no little energy in the latter part of his speech. As for Madame, she no longer regarded conventional proprieties; for when with her passion spoke in accents either of anger or of sympathy, nothing could any longer restrain her impulses. Madame approached Manicamp, who had sunk down upon a seat, as if his grief were a sufficiently powerful excuse for committing an infraction of one of the laws of etiquette. "Monsieur," she said, seizing him by the hand, "be frank with me!" Manicamp raised his head. "Is M. de Guiche in danger of death?"—"Doubly so, Madame," he replied; "in the first place on account of the hæmorrhage which has taken place, an artery having been injured in the hand; and next, in conse-

quence of the wound in his breast, which may—the doctor is afraid of it, at least—have injured some vital part."

"He may die, then?"—"Die?—yes, Madame; and without even having the consolation of knowing that you were aware of his devotion."—"You will tell him."—"I?"—"Yes; are you not his friend?"—"I? Oh, no, Madame! I will only tell M. de Guiche, if indeed the poor fellow is still in a condition to hear me,—I will only tell him what I have seen,—that is, your cruelty towards him."—"Oh, Monsieur, you surely will not be guilty of such barbarity!"

"Indeed, Madame, I shall speak the truth, for Nature is very energetic in a man of his age. The physicians are skilful men, and if by chance the poor count should survive his wound, I should not wish him still to be exposed to dying of a wound of the heart, after having escaped that of the body;" and with these words Manicamp rose, and with an expression of profound respect seemed to be desirous of taking leave.

"At least, Monsieur," said Madame, stopping him with almost a suppliant air, "you will be kind enough to tell me in what state your wounded friend is, and who is the physician who attends him?"—"As regards the state he is in, Madame, he is seriously ill; his physician is M. Valot, his Majesty's private medical attendant. M. Valot is, moreover, assisted by a professional friend, to whose house M. de Guiche has been carried."

"What! he is not in the château?" said Madame.—"Alas, Madame! the poor fellow was so ill that he could not even be conveyed hither."—"Give me the address, Monsieur," said the princess, hurriedly; "I will send to inquire after him."—"Rue du Feurre; a brick house, with white blinds. The doctor's name is on the door."

"You are returning to your wounded friend, M. de Manicamp?"—"Yes, Madame."—"You will be able, then, to do me a service?"—"I am at your Highness's orders."—"Do what you intended to do,—return to M. de Guiche, send away all those whom you may find there, and have the kindness yourself to go away too."—"Madame—"

"Let us waste no time in useless explanations. That is what I require; see nothing in it beyond what there really is, and ask nothing further than what I tell you. I am going to send one of my ladies, perhaps two, because it is now getting late. I do not wish them to see you, or, to be more frank, I do not wish you to see them. These are scruples which you can understand,

—you particularly, M. de Manicamp, who seem to be capable of divining everything."—"Oh, Madame, perfectly! I can even do better still. I will walk in advance of your messengers; it will at the same time be a means of showing them the way more accurately, and of protecting them if it should happen that they needed protection, although there is no probability of it!'

"And in this way, then, they would be sure of entering without any difficulty, would they not?"—"Certainly, Madame; for as I should be the first to pass, I should remove any difficulties which might chance to be in the way."—"Very well; go, go, M. de Manicamp, and wait at the bottom of the staircase."—"I go at once, Madame."

"Stay!" Manicamp paused. "When you hear the footsteps of two women descending the stairs, go out, and without once turning round, take the road which leads to where the poor count is lying."—"But if, by any mischance, two other persons were to descend, and I were to be mistaken?"—"You will hear one of the two clap her hands together very softly three times. So, go!"—"Yes, Madame;" and Manicamp turned, bowed once more, and left the room, his heart overflowing with joy. In fact, he knew very well that the presence of Madame herself would be the best balm to apply to his friend's wounds. A quarter of an hour had hardly elapsed when he heard the sound of a door opened softly, and closed with the same precaution. He then heard light footfalls gliding down the staircase, and then three strokes with the hands,—that is to say, the signal agreed upon. He immediately went out, and faithful to his promise bent his way, without once turning his head, through the streets of Fontainebleau towards the doctor's dwelling.

CHAPTER CLX

MALICORNE THE KEEPER OF THE RECORDS OF THE KINGDOM OF FRANCE

Two women, whose figures were completely concealed by their mantles, and whose black velvet masks effectually hid the upper portion of their faces, timidly followed Manicamp's steps. On the first floor, behind curtains of red damask, the soft light of a lamp placed upon a sideboard illumined a room, at the other

extremity of which, on a large bedstead supported by spiral columns, around which curtains of the same colour as those that deadened the rays of the lamp had been closely drawn, lay De Guiche, his head supported by pillows, his eyes looking as if the mists of death were gathering there; his long black hair, scattered in ringlets over the pillow, by its disorder made more prominent the hollowed and pale temples of the young man. It could easily be perceived that fever was the principal occupant of that chamber. De Guiche was dreaming. His wandering mind was pursuing, through gloom and mystery, one of those wild creations which delirium engenders. Two or three drops of blood, still liquid, stained the floor.

Manicamp hurriedly ran up the stairs, but paused at the threshold, gently opened the door, looked into the room, and seeing that everything was perfectly quiet, advanced on tiptoe to the large leathern arm-chair, a specimen of furniture of the reign of Henry IV., and seeing that the nurse, as a matter of course, had dropped off to sleep, awoke her, and begged her to pass into the adjoining room. Then, standing by the side of the bed, he remained for a moment deliberating whether it would be better to awaken De Guiche, in order to acquaint him with the good news. But as he began to hear behind the door the rustling of the silken dresses and the hurried breathing of those who had accompanied him, and as he already saw that the curtain which hung before the doorway seemed about to be drawn aside, he passed round the bed and followed the nurse into the next room. As soon as he had disappeared, the curtain was raised, and the two ladies entered the room he had just left.

The one who entered first made a gesture to her companion which caused her to take her position on a chair close to the door. Then she resolutely advanced towards the bed, drew back the curtains along the iron rod, and threw them in thick folds behind the head of the bed. She gazed upon the count's pallid face, remarked his right hand enveloped in linen whose dazzling whiteness was made more prominent by the counterpane covered with dark leaves which was thrown across a portion of this bed of pain. She shuddered as she saw a spot of blood becoming larger and larger upon the linen bandages. The young man's white chest was quite uncovered, as if the cool night air might assist his respiration. A small bandage fastened the dressings of the wound, around which a bluish circle of extravasated blood was gradually increasing in size. A deep sigh broke from the lips of the young woman. She leaned

against one of the columns of the bed, and gazed, through the holes in her mask, upon the harrowing spectacle before her. A hoarse harsh sigh passed like a death-rattle through the count's clinched teeth. The masked lady seized his left hand, which felt as hot as burning coals. But at the very moment she placed her icy hand upon it, the action of the cold was such that De Guiche opened his eyes, and with a look of reviving intelligence seemed as if struggling back again into existence. The first thing upon which he fixed his gaze was this phantom standing erect by his bedside. At that sight his eyes became dilated, but without any appearance of consciousness in them. The lady thereupon made a sign to her companion, who had remained near the door; and in all probability the latter had already received her lesson, for in a clear tone of voice, and without any hesitation whatever, she pronounced these words: "Monsieur the Count, her royal Highness Madame is desirous of knowing how you are bearing up under the pain of your wound, and to express to you, by my lips, her great regret at seeing you suffer."

As she pronounced the word "Madame," De Guiche started; he had not as yet noticed the person to whom the voice belonged, and he naturally turned towards the direction whence it proceeded. But as he felt the cold hand still resting on his own, he again turned to look at the motionless figure beside him. "Was it you who spoke to me, Madame?" he asked, in a weak voice, "or is there another person besides you in the room?"—"Yes," replied the figure, in an almost unintelligible voice, as she bent down her head.—"Well!" said the wounded man, with a great effort, "I thank you. Tell Madame that I no longer regret dying, since she has remembered me."

At this word "dying," pronounced by this seemingly dying man, the masked lady could not restrain her tears, which flowed under her mask, and appeared upon her cheeks just where the mask left her face bare. If De Guiche had been in fuller possession of his senses, he would have seen her tears roll like glistening pearls, and fall upon his bed. The lady, forgetting that she wore a mask, raised her hand as though to wipe her eyes, and meeting the rough cold velvet, she tore away her mask in anger and threw it on the floor. At the unexpected apparition before him, which seemed to issue from a cloud, De Guiche uttered a cry and stretched out his arms towards her; but every word perished on his lips, and his strength seemed utterly abandoning him. His right hand, which had followed his first impulse without

calculating the amount of strength he had left, fell back again upon the bed, and immediately afterwards the white linen was reddened with a larger spot than before. In the meantime the young man's eyes became dim, and closed as if he were already struggling with the unconquerable angel of death; and then, after a few involuntary movements, his head fell back motionless on his pillow,—from pale he had become livid. The lady was frightened; but now, contrary to its usual character, fright was fascinating. She leaned over the young man, gazed earnestly at his pale and cold face, which she was almost touching, then imprinted a rapid kiss upon the left hand of De Guiche, who, trembling as if an electric shock had passed through him, awoke a second time, opened his large eyes, incapable of recognition, and again fell into a state of complete insensibility. "Come," she said to her companion, "we must not remain here any longer; I shall be committing some folly or other."

"Madame, Madame, your Highness is forgetting your mask!" said her vigilant companion.—"Pick it up," replied her mistress, as she tottered distracted towards the staircase; and as the street-door had been left only half closed, the two women, light as birds, passed through it, and with hurried steps returned to the palace. One of them ascended towards Madame's apartments, where she disappeared; the other entered the room belonging to the maids of honour, namely, on the *entresol*, and having reached her own room, sat down before a table, and without giving herself time even to breathe, wrote the following letter:—

"This evening Madame has been to see M. de Guiche. Everything is going on well on this side. See that yours is the same, and do not forget to burn this paper."

She then folded the letter in a long thin form, and leaving her room with every possible precaution crossed a corridor which led to the apartments appropriated to the gentlemen attached to Monsieur's service. She stopped before a door, under which, having previously given two short, quick knocks, she thrust the paper and fled. Then, returning to her own room, she removed every trace of her having gone out and also of having written the letter. Amid the investigations she was so diligently pursuing for this purpose, she perceived on the table the mask which belonged to Madame, and which, according to her mistress's directions, she had brought back, but had forgotten

to restore to her. "Oh!" she said, "I must not forget to do to-morrow what I have forgotten to do to-day."

And she took hold of the velvet mask by that part of it which covered the cheeks, and feeling that her thumb was wet, she looked at it. It was not only wet, but reddened. The mask had fallen upon one of the spots of blood which we have already said stained the floor; and from the black velvet outside, which had accidentally come into contact with it, the blood had passed through to the inside and stained the white cambric lining. "Oh!" said Montalais, for doubtless our readers have already recognised her by these various manœuvres, "I shall not give her back her mask; it is far too precious now;" and rising from her seat, she ran to a box made of maple-wood, which enclosed different toilet articles and perfumery. "No, not here," she said; "such a treasure must not be abandoned to the slightest chance of detection." Then, after a moment's silence, and with a smile which was peculiarly her own, she added: "Beautiful mask, stained with the blood of that brave knight, you shall go and join that collection of wonders, La Vallière's and Raoul's letters,—that loving collection, indeed, which will some day or other form part of the history of France and of royalty. You shall be taken under M. Malicorne's care," said the laughing girl, as she began to undress herself,—"under the protection of that worthy M. Malicorne," she said, blowing out the taper, "who thinks he was born only to become the master of apartments to Monsieur, and whom I will make keeper of the records and historiographer of the house of Bourbon and of the first families in the kingdom. Let him grumble now, that discontented Malicorne!" and she drew the curtains and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER CLXI

THE JOURNEY

THE next day being agreed upon for the departure, the king, at eleven o'clock precisely, descended the grand staircase with the two queens and Madame, in order to enter his carriage drawn by six horses, which were pawing the ground in impatience at the foot of the steps. The whole court awaited the royal appearance in the Fer-à-Cheval, in their travelling costumes; the large number of saddled horses and carriages of ladies and gentlemen of the court, surrounded by their attendants, servants,

and pages, formed a brilliant spectacle. The king entered his carriage with the two queens; Madame entered a carriage with Monsieur. The maids of honour followed the example, and took their seats, two by two, in the carriages provided for them. The king's carriage headed the procession; then came that of Madame; then the others followed according to etiquette and rank. The weather was very warm; a light breeze, which early in the morning all had thought sufficient to cool the air, soon became fiercely heated by the rays of the sun, lying in wait behind the clouds, and filtered through the heated vapour which rose from the ground only as a scorching wind, bearing particles of fine dust against the faces of the impatient travellers. Madame was the first to complain of the heat. Monsieur's only reply was to throw himself back in the carriage, as if he were about to faint, and to inundate himself with salts and perfumes, uttering the deepest sighs all the while; whereupon Madame said to him, with her most amiable expression, "Really, Monsieur, I fancied that you would have been polite enough, on account of the terrible heat, to have left me my carriage to myself, and to have performed the journey yourself on horseback."—"Ride on horseback!" cried the prince, with an accent of dismay which showed how little idea he had of adopting this strange project; "you cannot be thinking of such a thing, Madame! My skin would peel off if I were to expose myself to such a burning air as this." Madame began to laugh. "You can take my parasol," she said.

"But the trouble of holding it!" replied Monsieur, with the greatest coolness; "besides, I have no horse."—"How? no horse!" replied the princess, who, if she did not obtain the solitude she desired, at least obtained the amusement of teasing, —"no horse! You are mistaken, Monsieur; for I see your favourite bay out yonder."—"My bay horse!" exclaimed the prince, attempting to lean forward to look out of the door; but the movement he was obliged to make cost him so much trouble that he did not half finish it, and he hastened to resume his position of repose. "Yes," said Madame; "your horse, led by M. de Malicorne."—"Poor beast!" replied the prince; "how warm he will be!"

And with these words he closed his eyes, like a man on the point of expiring. Madame, on her side, reclined indolently in the other corner of the carriage, and closed her eyes also, not however to sleep, but to think more at her ease. In the meantime the king, seated on the front seat of the carriage, the back

seat of which he had yielded up to the two queens, was a prey to that restless contrariness experienced by anxious lovers, who without being able to quench their ardent thirst are ceaselessly desirous of seeing the loved object, and then go away partially satisfied, without perceiving that they have acquired a more burning thirst than ever.

The king, whose carriage headed the procession, could not from the place he occupied perceive the carriages of the ladies and maids of honour, which came last. Besides, he was obliged to answer the eternal questions of the young queen, who, happy to have with her "*her dear husband*," as she called him, in utter forgetfulness of royal etiquette invested him with all her affection, stifled him with her attentions, afraid that some one might come to take him from her, or that he himself might suddenly take a fancy to leave her society. Anne of Austria, whom nothing at that moment disturbed except the occasional dull throbbings in her bosom, looked pleased and delighted, and although she perfectly conceived the king's impatience, tantalisingly prolonged his sufferings by unexpectedly resuming the conversation at the very moment when the king, absorbed in his own reflections, began to muse over his secret attachment. Everything—the little attentions of the queen, and the queen-mother's tantalising interruptions—seemed to combine to make the king's position almost insupportable; for he knew not how to control the restless longings of his heart. At first he complained of the heat,—a complaint which was merely preliminary to other complaints, but with sufficient tact to prevent Maria Theresa from guessing his real object. Understanding therefore the king's remark literally, she began to fan Louis with her ostrich plumes. But the heat passed away, and the king then complained of cramps and stiffness in his legs; and as the carriages at that moment stopped to change horses, the queen said: "Shall I get out with you? I too feel tired of sitting. We can walk on a little distance; the carriages will overtake us, and we can resume our places again."

The king frowned; it is a hard trial to which a jealous woman subjects her husband whose fidelity she suspects, when, although herself a prey to jealousy, she watches herself so narrowly that she avoids giving any pretext for an angry feeling. The king, therefore, in the present case could not refuse; he accepted the offer, alighted from the carriage, gave his arm to the queen, and walked a short distance with her while the horses were being changed. As he walked along, he cast an envious glance

upon the courtiers who were fortunate enough to be performing the journey on horseback. The queen soon found out that walking pleased the king as little as riding in the carriage. She accordingly expressed a wish to return to her carriage; and the king conducted her to the door, but he did not get in with her. He stepped back a few paces, and looked along the file of carriages to discover the one in which he took so strong an interest. At the door of the sixth carriage he saw La Vallière's fair countenance. As the king thus stood motionless, wrapped in thought, without perceiving that everything was ready, and that they were now waiting only for him, he heard a voice close beside him, addressing him in the most respectful manner. It was M. de Malicorne, in a complete costume of an equerry, holding over his left arm the bridles of two horses.

"Did your Majesty ask for a horse?" he said.—"A horse? Have you one of my horses here?" inquired the king, who endeavoured to remember the person who addressed him, and whose face was not as yet very familiar to him.—"Sire," replied Malicorne, "at all events, I have a horse which is at your Majesty's service;" and Malicorne pointed to Monsieur's bay horse, which Madame had observed. It was a beautiful creature and most royally caparisoned.

"But this is not one of my horses, Monsieur," said the king.—"Sire, it is a horse out of his royal highness's stables; but his royal highness does not ride when the weather is so hot." The king did not reply, but hastily approached the horse, which stood pawing the ground with his foot. Malicorne hastened to hold the stirrup for him, but his Majesty was already in the saddle. Restored to good humour by this lucky accident, the king hastened smilingly towards the queen's carriage, where he was anxiously expected; and notwithstanding Maria Theresa's preoccupied air, he said: "I have been fortunate enough to find this horse, and I intend to avail myself of it. I felt stifled in the carriage. Adieu, ladies!"

Then bending graciously over the arched neck of his steed, he disappeared in a second. Anne of Austria leaned forward, in order to look after him as he rode away; he did not go very far, for when he reached the sixth carriage, he reined in his horse suddenly and took off his hat. He saluted La Vallière, who uttered a cry of surprise as she saw him, blushing at the same time with pleasure. Montalais, who occupied the other seat in the carriage, made the king a most profound bow; and then, with all the tact of a woman, she pretended to be exceed-

ingly interested in the landscape, and withdrew herself into the left-hand corner.

The conversation between the king and La Vallière began, as all lovers' conversations generally do, by eloquent looks and by a few words devoid of meaning. The king explained how warm he had felt in his carriage,—so much so, indeed, that he had esteemed a horse as a benefaction. "And," he added, "my benefactor is an exceedingly intelligent man, for he seemed to guess my thoughts intuitively. I have now only one wish, that of learning the name of the gentleman who so cleverly served his king and extricated him from his painful weariness."

Montalais during this colloquy, the first words of which had awakened her attention, had slightly altered her position, and had contrived so as to meet the king's look as he finished his remark. It followed very naturally that the king looked inquiringly as much at her as at La Vallière; she had every reason to suppose that it was she who was appealed to, and consequently might be permitted to answer. She therefore said, "Sire, the horse which your Majesty is riding belongs to Monsieur, and was being led by one of his royal highness's gentlemen."—"And what is that gentleman's name, may I ask, Mademoiselle?"—"M. de Malicorne, Sire."

The name produced its usual effect, for the king repeated it smilingly. "Yes, Sire," replied Aure. "Stay! it is that gentleman who is galloping on my left hand;" and indeed she pointed out our Malicorne, who with a very sanctified expression was galloping on the left side of the carriage, knowing perfectly well they were talking of him at that very moment, but sitting in his saddle as if he were deaf and dumb. "Yes," said the king, "that is the gentleman. I remember his face, and will not forget his name;" and the king looked tenderly at La Vallière. Aure had now nothing further to do. She had let Malicorne's name fall; the soil was good; all that was necessary now was to let the name take root, and the event would bear its fruit in due time. She consequently threw herself back in her corner, feeling perfectly justified in making as many agreeable signs of recognition as she liked to M. de Malicorne, since the latter had had the happiness of pleasing the king. As will very readily be believed, Montalais was not mistaken; and Malicorne, with his quick ear and his sly look, seemed to interpret her remark as "All goes on well," the whole being accompanied by a pantomime which he fancied conveyed something resembling a kiss.

"Alas! Mademoiselle," said the king, after a moment's pause, "the liberty and freedom of the country are soon about to cease; your attendance upon Madame will be more strictly enforced, and we shall see each other no more."—"Your Majesty is too much attached to Madame," replied Louise, "not to come to see her frequently; and whenever your Majesty may pass across the apartments—"

"Ah!" said the king, in a tender voice, which was gradually lowered in its tone, "to perceive is not to see, and yet it seems that it would be quite sufficient for you." Louise did not answer; a sigh filled her heart almost to bursting, but she stifled it. "You exercise a great control over yourself," said the king to Louise, who smiled upon him with a melancholy expression. "Exert the strength you have in loving fondly," he continued, "and I will bless Heaven for having bestowed it on you."

La Vallière still remained silent, but raised her eyes, brimful of affection, to the king. Louis, as if he had been overcome by this burning glance, passed his hand across his forehead, and pressing his horse's sides with his knees made him bound several paces forward. La Vallière, leaning back in her carriage, with her eyes half closed, gazed fixedly upon this handsome cavalier, whose plumes were floating in the breeze; she could not but admire his graceful carriage, his delicate and nervous limbs, which pressed his horse's side, and the regular outline of his features, which his beautiful curling hair set off to great advantage, revealing occasionally his small and well-formed ear. In fact, the poor girl was in love, and she revelled in her love. In a few moments the king was again by her side. "Do you not perceive," he said, "how terribly your silence affects me? Oh, Mademoiselle, how pitilessly immovable you would become if you were ever to resolve to break off all acquaintance with any one! And then, too, I think you changeable; in fact,—in fact, I dread this deep love which I have for you."

"Oh, Sire, you are mistaken!" said La Vallière; "if ever I love, it will be for my whole life."—"*If* you love, you say," exclaimed the king, sorrowfully; "you do not love now, then." She hid her face in her hands. "You see," said the king, "that I am right in accusing you; you must admit that you are changeable, capricious, a coquette, perhaps."—"Oh, no, Sire, I assure you! No, I say again; no, no!"

"Promise me, then, that for me you will always be the same."—"Oh, always, Sire!"—"That you will never show any of

that severity which would break my heart, none of the sudden changes which would be worse than death to me."—"Oh, no, no!"—"Very well, then! but listen. I like promises; I like to place under the guaranty of an oath, under the protection of Heaven in fact, everything which interests my heart and my affections. Promise me, or rather swear to me, that if in the life we are about to begin,—a life which will be full of sacrifice, mystery, anxiety, disappointment, and misunderstanding,—swear to me that if we should be deceiving or should misunderstand each other, or should be judging each other unjustly, for that indeed would be criminal in love such as ours,—swear to me, Louise—"

La Vallière trembled with agitation to the very depths of her heart; it was the first time she had heard her name pronounced in that manner by her royal lover. As for the king, taking off his glove and reaching his ungloved hand within the carriage, he continued: "Swear that never in all our quarrels will we allow one night even to pass by, if any misunderstanding should arise between us, without a visit, or at least a message, from either, in order to convey consolation and repose to the other." La Vallière took her lover's burning hand between her own icy palms, and pressed it softly, until a movement of the horse, frightened by the proximity of the wheels, obliged her to abandon her happiness. She had sworn.

"Return, Sire," she said, "return to the queens; I foresee a storm rising yonder, which threatens my peace of mind." Louis obeyed, saluted Mademoiselle de Montalais, and set off at a gallop to rejoin the queens' carriage. As he passed Monsieur's carriage, he observed that he was fast asleep, although Madame, on her part, was wide awake. As the king passed her, she said, "What a beautiful horse, Sire! Is it not Monsieur's bay horse?" As for the young queen she merely remarked, "Are you better now, Sire?"

CHAPTER CLXII

TRIUMFEMINATE

On the king's arrival in Paris, he sat at the council which had been summoned, and worked for a certain portion of the day. The queen remained at home with the queen-mother, and burst into tears as soon as she had taken leave of the king. "Ah, Madame!" she said, "the king no longer loves me! What will become of me?"—"A husband always loves his wife when she is like you," replied Anne of Austria.

"A time may come when he will love another woman instead of me."—"What do you call loving?"—"Oh! always thinking of a person, always seeking her society."—"Do you happen to have remarked," said Anne of Austria, "that the king has ever done anything of the sort?"—"No, Madame," said the young queen, hesitatingly.

"What is there to complain of, then, Marie?"—"And yet, my mother, admit that the king leaves me."—"The king, my daughter, belongs to his people."—"And that is the very reason why he no longer belongs to me; and that is the reason, too, why I shall find myself, as so many queens have been before me, forsaken and forgotten, while love, glory, and honours will be reserved for others. Oh, my mother, the king is so handsome! How often will others tell him that they love him, and how much, indeed, they must do so!"—"It is very seldom that women love the man in loving the king. But should that happen,—which I doubt,—you should rather wish, Marie, that such women should really love your husband. In the first place, the devoted love of a mistress is an element in the rapid dissolution of a lover's affection; and in the second place, by dint of loving, the mistress loses all influence over her lover, whose power or wealth she does not covet, caring only for his affection. Wish, therefore, that the king should love but lightly, and that his mistress should love with all her heart."

"Oh, my mother, what power may not a deep affection exercise over him!"—"And yet you say you are abandoned?"—"Quite true, quite true; I speak absurdly. There is a feeling of anguish, however, which I can never control."—"And that is—"—"The king may make a happy choice,—may find a home, not far from that we can offer him,—a home with children

around him, the children of another woman than myself. Oh, I should die if I were ever to see the king's children!"

"Marie, Marie!" replied the queen-mother, with a smile, as she took the young queen's hand in her own, "remember what I am going to say, and let it always be a consolation to you,—the king cannot have a dauphin without you, and you may have one without him." With this remark, which she accompanied with an expressive burst of laughter, the queen-mother left her daughter-in-law in order to go to meet Madame, whose arrival in the grand boudoir had just been announced by one of the pages.

Madame had scarcely taken time to change her dress. Her face revealed her agitation, which betrayed a plan the execution of which occupied her mind, while the probable results disturbed her. "I came to ascertain," she said, "whether your Majesties are suffering any fatigue from our journey."—"None at all," said the queen-mother.—"Very slight," replied Maria Theresa.—"I have suffered from annoyance more than from anything else," said Madame.

"What annoyance?" inquired Anne of Austria.—"The fatigue which the king undergoes in riding on horseback."—"That does the king good."—"And it was I who advised him to do it," said Maria Theresa, turning pale.

Madame said not a word in reply; but one of those smiles which were peculiarly her own flitted for a moment across her lips, without passing over the rest of her face; then, immediately changing the subject of conversation, she continued: "We shall find Paris precisely like the Paris we left,—the same intrigues, plots, and flirtations going on."—"Intrigues! To what intrigues do you allude?" inquired the queen-mother.

"People are talking a good deal about M. Fouquet and Madame de Plessis-Bellière."—"Who makes up the number to about ten thousand," replied the queen-mother. "But what are the plots, if you please?"—"We have, it seems, certain misunderstandings with Holland."—"What about?"—"Monsieur has been telling me the story of the medals."

"Oh!" exclaimed the young queen, "you mean those medals which were struck in Holland, on which a cloud is seen passing across the sun, which is the king's device. You are wrong in calling that a plot,—it is an insult."—"But so contemptible that the king can well despise it," replied the queen-mother. "Well, what are the flirtations to which you allude? Do you mean that of Madame d'Olonne?"—"No, no; nearer ourselves

than that."—"*Casa de usted*," murmured the queen-mother, and without moving her lips, in Maria Theresa's ear.

She was not overheard by Madame, who thus continued: "You know the terrible news?"—"Oh, yes; M. de Guiche's wound."—"And do you attribute it, as every one else does, to an accident which happened to him while hunting?"—"Why, yes," said both the queens together, their interest awakened.

Madame drew closer to them, as she said, in a low tone, "It was a duel."—"Ah!" said Anne of Austria, in a severe tone; for in her ears the word "duel," which had been forbidden in France since she had reigned over it, had a wicked sound.—"A most deplorable duel, which has nearly cost Monsieur two of his best friends, and the king two of his best servants."

"What was the cause of the duel?" inquired the young queen, animated by a secret instinct.—"Flirtations," repeated Madame, triumphantly. "These gentlemen were conversing about the virtue of a lady. One of them thought that Pallas was a very second-rate person compared to her; the other pretended that the lady in question was an imitation of Venus alluring Mars; and upon my word the two gentlemen fought like Hector and Achilles."—"Venus alluring Mars?" said the young queen, in a low tone, without venturing to examine into the allegory very deeply.

"Who is the lady?" inquired Anne of Austria, abruptly. "You said, I believe, that she was one of the ladies of honour?"—"Did I say so?" replied Madame.—"Yes; I even thought that I heard you give her name."—"Are you not aware that such a woman is of ill omen to a royal house?"

"Is it Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said the queen-mother.—"Yes, indeed, it is that ugly little creature."—"I thought that she was affianced to a gentleman who certainly is not—at least, I suppose so—either M. de Guiche or M. de Wardes."—"Very possibly, Madame."

The young queen took up a piece of tapestry, and began to unravel it with an affectation of tranquillity which her trembling fingers contradicted. "What were you saying about Venus and Mars?" pursued the queen-mother. "Is there a Mars also?"—"She boasts of that being the case."—"Did you say she boasts of it?"—"That was the cause of the duel."—"And M. de Guiche upheld the cause of Mars?"—"Yes, certainly, like the devoted servant he is."

"The devoted servant of whom?" exclaimed the young queen, forgetting all her reserve in allowing her jealousy to escape

her; "the servant of whom?"—"Mars not being able to be defended except at the expense of this Venus," replied Madame, "M. de Guiche maintained the perfect innocence of Mars, and no doubt affirmed that it was a mere boast of Venus."—"And M. de Wardes," said Anne of Austria, quietly, "spread the report that Venus was right, I suppose?"—"Ah! De Wardes," thought Madame, "you shall pay most dearly for the wound you have given that noblest of men!" And she began to attack De Wardes with the greatest bitterness; thus discharging the debt of the wounded man and her own, with the assurance that she was working the future ruin of her enemy. She said so much, in fact, that had Manicamp been there he would have regretted that he had shown such strong regard for his friend, inasmuch as it resulted in the ruin of his unfortunate foe.

"I see in the whole affair but one cause of mischief, and that is La Vallière herself," said the queen-mother. The young queen resumed her work with a perfect indifference of manner, while Madame listened eagerly. "Is not that your opinion?" said Anne of Austria to her. "Do you not lay to her the cause of this quarrel and encounter?" Madame replied by a gesture which was no more a sign of affirmation than of dissent.

"I do not yet quite understand what you said just now about the danger of coquetry," resumed Anne of Austria.—"It is quite true," Madame hastened to say, "that if the girl had not been a coquette, Mars would not have thought at all about her."

The repetition of this word "Mars" brought a passing colour to the young queen's cheeks; but she still continued her work. "I will not permit that in my court gentlemen should be set against one another in this manner," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Such manners were useful enough, perhaps, in a time when the divided nobility had no other rallying-point than mere gallantry. At that time women, whose sway was absolute and undivided, were privileged to encourage men's valour by frequent trials of their courage; but now, thank Heaven, there is but one master in France, and to him every thought of the mind and every pulse of the body are due. I will not allow my son to be deprived of any one of his servants;" and she turned towards the young queen, saying, "What is to be done with this La Vallière?"

"La Vallière?" said the queen, apparently surprised; "I do not even know the name;" and she accompanied this answer with one of those frigid smiles which are observed only on royal

lips. Madame was herself a princess great in every respect,—great in intelligence, great by birth and pride. The queen's reply, however, completely astonished her, and she was obliged to pause for a moment in order to recover herself. "She is one of my maids of honour," she replied, with a bow.—"In that case," retorted Maria Theresa, in the same tone, "it is your affair, my sister, and not ours."

"I beg your pardon," resumed Anne of Austria, "it is my affair; and I perfectly well understand," she pursued, addressing a look full of intelligence at Madame, "Madame's motive for saying what she has just said."—"Everything which emanates from you, Madame," said the English princess, "proceeds from the lips of Wisdom."

"If we send this girl back again to her own family," said Maria Theresa, gently, "we must bestow a pension upon her."—"Which I will provide for out of my income," exclaimed Madame, quickly.—"No, no, Madame," interrupted Anne of Austria; "no disturbance, I beg. The king does not like to have any woman spoken of with disrespect. Let everything be done quietly, if you please. Will you have the kindness, Madame, to send for this girl here? You, my daughter, will have the goodness to retire to your own room." The old queen's requests were commands; and as Maria Theresa rose to return to her own apartments, Madame rose in order to send a page to summon La Vallière.

CHAPTER CLXIII

THE FIRST QUARREL

La Vallière entered the queen-mother's apartments without in the least suspecting that a serious plot was being concerted against her. She thought it was for something connected with her duties, and never had the queen-mother been unkind to her when such was the case. Besides, not being immediately under the control of Anne of Austria, she could have only an official connection with her, to which her own gentleness of disposition and the rank of the august princess made her yield on every occasion with the best possible grace. She therefore advanced towards the queen-mother with that soft and gentle smile which constituted her principal charm; and as she did not

approach sufficiently close, Anne of Austria signed to her to come nearer. Madame then entered the room, and with a perfectly calm air took her seat beside her mother-in-law and continued the work which Maria Theresa had begun. When La Vallière, instead of the directions which she expected immediately to receive, perceived these preparations, she looked with curiosity, if not with uneasiness, at the two princesses. Anne seemed deliberating, while Madame maintained an affectation of indifference which would have alarmed a less timid person even than Louise.

"Mademoiselle," said the queen-mother suddenly, without attempting to moderate or disguise her Spanish accent, which she never failed to do except when she was angry, "come closer; we were talking of you, as every one else seems to be doing."—"Of me!" exclaimed La Vallière, turning pale.

"Pretend to be ignorant of it; that is right. Do you know of the duel between M. de Guiche and M. de Wardes?"—"Oh, Madame! I heard a rumour of it yesterday," said La Vallière, clasping her hands.

"And did you not foresee this quarrel?"—"Why should I, Madame?"—"Because two men never fight without a motive, and because you must be aware of the motive which awakened the animosity of the two adversaries."—"I am perfectly ignorant of it, Madame."—"A persevering denial is a very commonplace mode of defence; and you, who have great pretensions to be witty and clever, Mademoiselle, ought to avoid commonplaces. What else have you to say?"—"Oh, Madame, your Majesty terrifies me with your cold severity! Have I been so unfortunate as to incur your displeasure?"

Madame began to laugh, and La Vallière looked at her with an amazed air. Anne resumed: "My displeasure!—incur my displeasure! You do not reflect, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, that it is necessary for me to notice people in order to visit them with my displeasure. I notice you only because people are talking about you a little too much, and I do not like to have them talk about the young ladies of my court."—"Your Majesty does me great honour," replied La Vallière, alarmed; "but I do not understand why people should occupy themselves with me."

"Then I will tell you. M. de Guiche has been obliged to undertake your defence."—"My defence?"—"Yes. He is a gallant knight, and beautiful adventuresses like to see brave knights couch their lances in their honour. But for my part

I hate fields of battle; and more than all, do I hate adventures, and— Make your own application!"

La Vallière sank at the queen's feet, who turned her back upon her. She stretched out her hands towards Madame, who laughed in her face. A feeling of pride made her rise to her feet. "I have begged your Majesty to tell me what is the crime I am accused of,—I can claim this at your Majesty's hands; and I observe that I am condemned before I am even permitted to justify myself."

"Eh! indeed," cried Anne of Austria, "listen to her fine phrases, Madame, and to her fine sentiments; she is an inexhaustible well of tenderness and of heroic expressions. One can easily see, young lady, that we have cultivated our mind in the society of crowned heads." La Vallière felt struck to the heart; she became, not paler, but as white as a lily, and all her strength forsook her.

"I wished to inform you," interrupted the queen, disdainfully, "that if you continue to nourish such feelings, you will humiliate the rest of us to such a degree that we shall be ashamed to appear before you. Become simple in your manners, Mademoiselle! By the by, I am informed that you are affianced; is it the case?" La Vallière pressed her hand over her heart, which was wrung with a fresh pang. "Answer when you are spoken to!"—"Yes, Madame."—"To a gentleman?"—"Yes, Madame."—"His name?"—"M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Are you aware that it is an exceedingly fortunate circumstance for you, Mademoiselle, that such is the case? And without fortune or position, as you are, or without any very great personal advantages, you ought to bless Heaven for having procured you such a future as seems to be in store for you." La Vallière did not reply.

"Where is this Vicomte de Bragelonne?" pursued the queen. —"In England," said Madame, "where the report of this young lady's success will not fail to reach him."—"Oh, Heaven!" murmured La Vallière, in despair.

"Very well, Mademoiselle," said Anne of Austria, "we will get this young gentleman to return, and send you away somewhere with him. If you are of a different opinion,—for girls have strange views and fancies at times,—trust to me, I will put you in the proper path again. I have done as much for girls who are not so good as you are, perhaps." La Vallière ceased to hear the queen, who pitilessly added: "I will send you somewhere by yourself, where you may reflect seriously.

Reflection calms the ardour of the blood, and swallows up all the illusions of youth. I suppose you have understood me?"

"Madame, Madame!"—"Not a word!"—"Madame, I am innocent of everything your Majesty can suppose. Oh, Madame you are a witness of my despair. I love, I respect, your Majesty so much!"—"It would be far better not to respect me at all," said the queen, with chilling irony. "It would be far better if you were not innocent. Do you presume to suppose that I should be satisfied simply to leave you unpunished if you had committed the fault?"

"Oh, Madame, you are killing me!"—"No acting, if you please, or I will undertake the *dénouement* of the comedy. Leave the room; return to your own apartment, and I trust my lesson may be of service to you."—"Madame!" said La Vallière to the Duchesse d'Orléans, whose hands she seized in her own, "do you, who are so good, intercede for me!"—"I!" replied the latter, with an insulting joy, "I—good! Ah, Mademoiselle, I shall do nothing of the kind!" and with a rude, hasty gesture, she repulsed the young girl's hand.

La Vallière, instead of giving way, as from her extreme pallor and from her tears the two princesses might possibly have expected, suddenly resumed her calm and dignified air; she bowed profoundly, and left the room.

"Well!" said Anne of Austria to Madame, "do you think that she will begin again?"—"I always suspect those gentle and patient characters," replied Madame. "Nothing is more full of courage than a patient heart; nothing is more self-reliant than a gentle spirit."—"I assure you that she will think twice before she looks at the god Mars again."—"Unless she secures the protection of his buckler," retorted Madame.

A proud, defiant look of the queen-mother was the reply to this objection, which was by no means deficient in shrewdness; and both of them, almost sure of their victory, went to look for Maria Theresa, who was awaiting them and trying to disguise her impatience.

It was then about half-past six in the evening, and the king had just partaken of some refreshment. He lost no time; but no sooner was the repast finished, and business matters settled, than he took De Saint-Aignan by the arm, and desired him to lead him to La Vallière's apartments. The courtier uttered a loud exclamation. "Well, what is that for?" replied the king. "It is a habit you will have to adopt; and in order to adopt a habit, you have to make a beginning."

"But, Sire, the young ladies' apartments here are as open as daylight; every one can see those who enter or leave them. If, however, some pretext or other were made use of,—if your Majesty, for instance, would wait until Madame were in her own apartments—"—"No pretexts, no delays. I have had enough of these disappointments and these mysteries; I cannot perceive in what respect the King of France dishonours himself in conversing with a clever girl. Evil be to him who evil thinks!"

"Will your Majesty forgive an excess of zeal on my part?"—"Speak freely."—"And the queen?"—"True, true! I always wish the greatest respect to be shown to her Majesty. Well, then, this evening only will I pay Mademoiselle de la Vallière a visit, and after to-day I will make use of all the pretexts you like. To-morrow we seek them; to-night I have not the time."

De Saint-Aignan did not reply; he descended the steps, preceding the king, and crossed the different courtyards with a feeling of shame, which the distinguished honour of supporting the king did not remove. For De Saint-Aignan wished to stand well with Madame as well as with the two queens, and he did not, on the other hand, wish to displease Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and in order to carry out so many promising affairs, it was difficult to avoid jostling against some obstacle or other. Besides, the windows of the young queen's rooms, these of the queen-mother's, and of Madame's looked out upon the courtyard of the maids of honour. To be seen conducting the king, therefore, would be effectually to quarrel with three great princesses—with three women whose authority was unbounded—for the slight inducement of gaining ephemeral credit with a mistress. The unhappy De Saint-Aignan, who had displayed so much courage in taking La Vallière's part in the park of Fontainebleau, did not feel himself so brave in the broad daylight, and found a thousand defects in the poor girl which he was most eager to communicate to the king. But his trial was soon over,—the courtyards were crossed; not a curtain was drawn aside, nor a window opened. The king walked quickly because of his impatience, and also because of the long legs of De Saint-Aignan, who preceded him. At the door De Saint-Aignan wished to retire, but the king desired him to remain; this was a delicate consideration on the king's part, which the courtier could very well have dispensed with. He had to follow Louis into La Vallière's apartment. As soon as the king arrived, the young girl dried her tears, but did it so hurriedly that the king per-

ceived it. He questioned her most anxiously and tenderly, and pressed her to tell him the cause of her emotion.

"I have nothing the matter with me, Sire," she said.—"And yet you were weeping."—"Oh, no, indeed, Sire."—"Look, De Saint-Aignan! am I mistaken?"

De Saint-Aignan ought to have answered, but he was greatly embarrassed. "At all events, your eyes are red, Mademoiselle," said the king.—"The dust of the road merely, Sire."

"No, no; you no longer possess that air of supreme contentment which renders you so beautiful and so attractive. You do not look at me. Why avoid my gaze?" he said, as she turned aside her head. "In Heaven's name, what is the matter?" he inquired, beginning to lose all command over himself.—"Nothing at all, Sire, I repeat! and I am perfectly ready to assure your Majesty that my mind is as free from anxiety as you could possibly wish."

"Your mind at ease, when I see that you are embarrassed in your every look and gesture! Has any one wounded or annoyed you?"—"No, no, Sire."—"I insist upon knowing if such really be the case," said the young prince, his eyes flashing.

"No one, Sire; no one has offended me."—"In that case do resume your gentle air of gaiety, or that sweet melancholy look which I so loved in you this morning; for pity's sake, do so!"—"Yes, Sire, yes."

The king struck the floor impatiently with his foot, saying, "Such a change is positively inexplicable;" and he looked at De Saint-Aignan, who had also remarked La Vallière's heavy languor of manner as well as the king's impatience. It was utterly useless for the king to entreat, and as useless for him to try his utmost to overcome that deadly sorrow; the poor girl was completely prostrated,—the aspect of death itself could not have awakened her from her torpor. The king saw, in her repeated negative replies, a mystery full of unkindness; he began to look all around him with a suspicious air.

There happened to be in La Vallière's room a miniature portrait of Athos. The king remarked this portrait, which bore a considerable resemblance to Bragelonne, for it had been taken when the count was quite a young man. He regarded this picture with a threatening air. La Vallière, in her depressed state of mind, and very far indeed from thinking of this portrait, could not interpret the king's preoccupation. And yet the king's mind was occupied with a terrible remembrance, which had more than once taken possession of him, but which he had

always driven away. He recalled the intimacy which had existed between the two young persons from their birth, the engagement which had followed, and the fact that Athos had himself come to solicit La Vallière's hand for Raoul. He imagined that on her return to Paris La Vallière had found certain news from London awaiting her, and that this news had counterbalanced the influence which he had been enabled to exert over her. He immediately felt himself stung, as it were, by feelings of the wildest jealousy; and he again questioned her, with increased bitterness.

La Vallière could not reply, unless she were to acknowledge everything, which would be to accuse the queen, and Madame also; and the consequence would be that she would have to enter upon an open warfare with these two great and powerful princesses. She thought within herself that as she made no attempt to conceal from the king what was passing in her own mind, the king ought to be able to read her heart, in spite of her silence; and that if he really loved her, he would have understood, and guessed everything. What was sympathy, then, if it were not that divine flame which should enlighten the heart, and save true lovers the necessity of words? She maintained her silence, therefore, satisfying herself with sighing, weeping, and concealing her face in her hands. These sighs and tears, which had at first distressed and then alarmed Louis XIV., now irritated him. He could not bear any opposition,—not the opposition which tears and sighs exhibited, any more than opposition of any other kind. His remarks, therefore, became bitter, urgent, and aggressive. This was a fresh cause of distress for the poor girl. From that very circumstance which she regarded as an injustice on her lover's part, she drew sufficient courage to bear, not only her other troubles, but even this one also.

The king next began to accuse her in direct terms. La Vallière did not even attempt to defend herself; she endured all his accusations without according any other reply than that of shaking her head, without making any other remark than that which escapes every heart in deep distress, by a prayerful appeal to Heaven for help. But this ejaculation, instead of calming the king's displeasure, rather increased it; it was an appeal to a higher power than his own, to a being who could protect La Vallière against himself. He, moreover, saw himself seconded by De Saint-Aignan; for De Saint-Aignan, as we have observed, having seen the storm increasing, and not knowing the extent of the regard of which Louis XIV. was

capable, felt by anticipation all the collected wrath of the three princesses, and the near approach of poor La Vallière's downfall, and he was not true knight enough to resist the fear that he himself might possibly be dragged down in the impending ruin. De Saint-Aignan did not reply to the king's questions except by short remarks, pronounced half aloud; and by abrupt gestures, whose object was to make things worse, and bring about a misunderstanding, the result of which would be to free him from the annoyance of having to cross the courtyards in broad open day, in order to follow his illustrious companion to La Vallière's apartments.

In the meantime the king's anger momentarily increased; he made two or three steps towards the door, as if to leave the room, but then returned; the young girl had not raised her head although the sound of his footsteps might have warned her that her lover was leaving her. He drew himself up for a moment before her, with his arms crossed. "For the last time, Mademoiselle," he said, "will you speak? Will you assign a reason for this change, for this fickleness, for this caprice?"—"What can I say?" murmured La Vallière. "Do you not see, Sire, that I am completely overwhelmed at this moment,—that I have no power of will or thought or speech?"

"Is it so difficult, then, to speak the truth? You would have told me the truth in fewer words than those you have just uttered."—"But the truth about what, Sire?"—"About everything." La Vallière was just on the point of revealing the whole truth to the king; her arms made a sudden movement as if they were about to open, but her lips remained silent, and her arms resumed their former position. The poor girl had not yet endured sufficient unhappiness to risk the necessary revelation. "I know nothing," she stammered out.

"Oh!" exclaimed the king, "this is more than mere coquetry or caprice; it is treason." And this time nothing could restrain him; the impulses of his heart were not sufficient to induce him to turn back, and he darted out of the room with a gesture of despair. De Saint-Aignan followed him, wishing for nothing better than to leave the place.

Louis XIV. did not pause until he reached the staircase, and grasping the balustrade said, "You see how shamefully I have been duped."—"How, Sire?" inquired the favourite.—"De Guiche fought on the Vicomte de Bragelonne's account, and this Bragelonne—oh, she still loves him! I vow to you, De Saint-Aignan, that if three days hence there should remain but

an atom of affection for her in my heart, I should die from very shame;" and the king resumed his way to his own apartments.

"I assured your Majesty how it would be," murmured De Saint-Aignan, continuing to follow the king, and timidly glancing up at all the windows. Unfortunately their return was not unobserved, as their arrival had been. A curtain was hurriedly drawn aside; Madame behind it. She had seen the king leave the apartments of the maids of honour; and as soon as his Majesty had passed, she rose, left her own apartments hurriedly, and ran up the staircase, two steps at a time, which led to the room the king had just left.

CHAPTER CLXIV

DESPAIR

After the departure of the king, La Vallière raised herself from the ground, and extended her arms, as if to follow and detain him; but when he had violently closed the door, and the sound of his retreating footsteps was lost in the distance, she had hardly sufficient strength left to totter towards and fall at the foot of her crucifix. There she remained, broken-hearted, crushed, and overwhelmed by despair, forgetful of and indifferent to everything but her grief itself,—a grief, moreover, which she could not comprehend except by instinct and sensation. In the midst of the wild tumult of her thoughts, La Vallière heard her door open again; she started, and turned round, thinking that it was the king who had returned. She was mistaken; it was Madame. What did she now care for Madame! Again she sank down, her head resting upon her devotional chair. It was Madame, excited, irritated, and threatening. But what was that to her? "Mademoiselle," said the princess, standing before La Vallière, "this is very fine, I admit,—to kneel, and pray, and make a pretence of being religious; but however submissive you may be before the King of heaven, it is desirable that you should pay some little attention to the will of the princes of the earth."

La Vallière raised her head painfully in token of respect. "Not long since," continued Madame, "a certain recommendation was addressed to you, I believe." La Vallière's fixed and wild gaze showed her unconsciousness and her forgetfulness. "The queen recommended you," continued Madame, "to con-

duct yourself in such a manner that no one could be justified in spreading any reports about you." La Vallière's look became an inquiring one. "Well," continued Madame, "there has just gone out of your rooms some one whose presence here is an accusation against you."

La Vallière remained silent. "I will not," continued Madame, "allow my household, which is that of the first princess of the blood, to set an evil example to the court; you would be the cause of such an example. I beg you to understand, therefore, Mademoiselle, in the absence of any witness,—for I do not wish to humiliate you,—that you are from this moment at perfect liberty to leave, and that you may return to your mother at Blois." La Vallière could not sink lower, nor could she suffer more than she had already suffered. Her countenance did not even change, but she remained with her hands crossed over her knees like the figure of the Magdalen.

"Did you hear me?" said Madame. A shiver, which passed through her whole frame, was La Vallière's only reply; and as the victim gave no other sign of life, Madame left the room. And then, the very action of her heart suspended, and her blood almost congealed as it were in her veins, La Vallière by degrees felt that the pulsations in her wrists, her neck, and temples became more and more rapid. These pulsations, as they gradually increased, soon changed into a species of brain fever, and in her temporary delirium she saw the figures of her friends contending with her enemies, floating before her vision. She heard, too, mingled together in her deafened ears, words of menace and words of fond affection; she no longer had any consciousness of self-identity; she seemed raised out of her former existence as though upon the wings of a mighty tempest, and in the dim horizon of the path along which her delirium hurried her, she saw the stone which covered her tomb upraised, and the dark and appalling interior of eternal night revealed to her. But the horror of the dream which had possessed her senses soon faded away, and she was again restored to her habitual resignation. A ray of hope penetrated her heart, as a ray of sunlight streams into the dungeon of some unhappy prisoner. Her mind reverted to the journey from Fontainebleau; she saw the king at the door of her carriage, telling her that he loved her, asking for her love in return, requiring her to swear, and himself swearing too, that never should an evening pass by, if ever a misunderstanding were to arise between them, without a visit, a letter, a sign of some kind, being sent,

to replace the troubled anxiety of the evening by the calm repose of the night. It was the king who had suggested that, who had imposed a promise upon her, who had himself sworn it also. It was impossible, therefore, she reasoned, that the king should fail to keep the promise which he had himself exacted, unless, indeed, the king were a despot who enforced love as he enforced obedience; unless, too, the king were so indifferent that the first obstacle in his way were sufficient to arrest his further progress. The king, that kind protector, who by a word, by a single word, could relieve her distress of mind, —the king even joined her persecutors. Oh, his anger could not possibly last! Now that he was alone, he would be suffering all that she herself was a prey to. But he was not tied hand and foot as she was: he could act, could move about, could come to her; while she, she—could do nothing but wait. And the poor girl waited and waited with breathless anxiety, for she could not believe it possible that the king would not come.

It was now nearly half-past ten. He would either come to her, or write to her, or send some kind word by M. de Saint-Aignan. If he were to come, oh! how she would fly to meet him; how she would thrust aside that excess of delicacy which she now discovered was misunderstood; how eagerly she would explain: "It is not I who do not love you; it is the fault of others who will not allow me to love you!" And then it must be confessed that as she reflected upon it, and precisely in proportion as she reflected, Louis appeared to her to be less blameworthy. In fact, he was ignorant of everything. What must he have thought of the obstinacy with which she had remained silent? Impatient and irritable as the king was known to be, it was extraordinary that he had been able to preserve his temper so long. Oh, she certainly would not have acted in such a manner; she would have understood everything, have guessed everything! Yes; but she was a poor girl, and not a great king. Oh, if he did but come, if he would but come, how eagerly she would forgive him for all he had just made her suffer! how much more tenderly she would love him because she had so suffered! And so she sat, with her head bent forward in eager expectation towards the door, her lips slightly parted, awaiting —and Heaven forgive her for the thought!—the kiss which the king's lips had in the morning so sweetly indicated when he pronounced the word *amour!* If the king did not come, at least he would write; it was a second chance,—a chance less delightful, less happy than the other, but which would show an

affection just as strong, if more timorous in its nature. Oh, how she would devour his letter, how she would hasten to answer it! and when the messenger who had brought it had left her, how she would kiss, read over and over again, press upon her heart the happy paper which would have brought her ease of mind, tranquillity, and perfect happiness! At all events, the king was not coming; if the king did not write, he could not do otherwise than send De Saint-Aignan, or De Saint-Aignan could not do otherwise than come of his own accord. Even if it were a third person, how openly she would speak to him,—the royal presence would not be there to freeze her words upon her tongue,—and then no suspicious feeling would remain a moment longer in the king's heart.

Everything with La Vallière—heart and look, body and mind—was concentrated in eager expectation. She said to herself that there still remained an hour of hope; that until midnight had struck, the king might come or write or send; that at midnight only would every expectation be useless, every hope disappointed. Whenever there was any noise in the palace, the poor girl fancied she was the occasion of it; whenever she heard any one pass in the courtyard below, she imagined that they were messengers of the king coming to her. Eleven o'clock struck; then a quarter-past eleven; then half-past. The minutes dragged slowly on in this anxiety, and yet they seemed to pass far too quickly. And now it struck a quarter to twelve. Midnight, midnight,—the last, the final hope,—came in its turn. With the last stroke of the clock the last light was extinguished; with the last light, the last hope. And so the king himself had deceived her; he had been the first to prove false to the oath which he had sworn that very day. Twelve hours only between his oath and his perjury; it was not long, certainly, to have preserved the illusion. And so not only did the king not love her, but still more, he despised her, whom every one overwhelmed,—he despised her to the extent even of abandoning her to the shame of an expulsion which was equivalent to having an ignominious sentence passed upon her; and yet it was he, the king himself, who was the first cause of this ignominy.

A bitter smile, the only symptom of anger which during this long conflict had passed across the victim's angelic face, appeared upon her lips. What, in fact, now remained on earth for her, after the king was lost to her? Nothing. But God remained in heaven. She thought of God. "My God!" she said, "show me thyself what course I ought to take. It is from thee that

I receive everything, and on thee I ought still to depend;" and she looked at her crucifix with humble and loving devotion. "There," she said, "is a Master who never forgets and never abandons those who do not abandon and who do not forget him; it is to him alone that we must sacrifice ourselves;" and thereupon, could any one have gazed into the recesses of that chamber, he would have seen the poor despairing girl adopt a final resolution, determine upon one last plan in her mind, and mount indeed that lofty Jacob's ladder which leads souls from earth to heaven. Then, as her knees were no longer able to support her, she gradually sank down upon the *prie-dieu*, and with her head pressed against the wooden cross, her eyes fixed, and her respiration short and quick, she watched for the earliest rays of approaching daylight.

At two o'clock in the morning she was still in the same bewilderment of mind, or rather in the same ecstasy of feeling. Her thoughts had almost ceased to hold any communion with the things of this world. And then she saw the violet tints of early dawn descend upon the roofs of the palace and vaguely reveal the outlines of the ivory crucifix which she embraced, she rose from the ground with a new-born strength, kissed the feet of the divine martyr, and descended the staircase leading from the room, wrapping herself from head to foot in a mantle as she went along. She reached the wicket at the very moment when the guard of musketeers opened the gate to admit the first relief-guard belonging to one of the Swiss regiments; and then, gliding behind the soldiers, she reached the street before the officer in command of the patrol had even thought of asking who the young girl was who was making her escape from the palace at so early an hour.

CHAPTER CLXV

THE FLIGHT

La Vallière followed the patrol as it left the courtyard. The patrol bent its steps towards the right, by the Rue St. Honoré, and mechanically La Vallière went to the left. Her resolution was taken, her determination fixed; she wished to betake herself to the convent of the Carmelites at Chaillot, the superior of which enjoyed a reputation for severity which would make the worldly-minded people of the court tremble. La Vallière had never seen Paris. She had never gone out on foot, and so would have been unable to find her way, even had she been in a calmer frame of mind; and this may explain why she ascended, instead of descended, the Rue St. Honoré. Her only thought was to get away from the Palais-Royal, and this she was doing. She had heard it said that Chaillot looked out upon the Seine, and she accordingly directed her steps towards the Seine. She took the Rue du Coq, and not being able to cross the Louvre, bore towards the church of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois, proceeding along the site of the colonnade which was subsequently built there by Perrault.

In a very short time she reached the quays. Her steps were rapid and agitated; she scarcely felt the weakness which now and then reminded her of having sprained her foot when very young, and which obliged her to limp slightly. At any other hour in the day her countenance would have awakened the suspicions of the least clear-sighted persons or have attracted the attention of the most indifferent passers-by. But at half-past two in the morning the streets of Paris are almost, if not quite, deserted, and scarcely any one is to be seen but the hard-working artisan on his way to earn his daily bread, or the dangerous idlers of the streets, who are returning to their homes after a night of riot and debauchery; for the former the day was beginning, for the latter it was just closing. La Vallière was afraid of all those faces, in which her ignorance of Parisian types did not permit her to distinguish the type of probity from that of dishonesty. The appearance of misery alarmed her, and all whom she met seemed wretched and miserable. Her toilet, which was the same she had worn during the previous evening, was elegant even in its careless disorder, for it was the

one in which she had presented herself to the queen-mother; and, moreover, when she drew aside the mantle which covered her face, in order to enable her to see the way she was going, her pallor and her beautiful eyes spoke an unknown language to the men she met, and without knowing it, the poor fugitive awakened the brutality of some, the compassion of others.

La Vallière still walked on in the same way, breathless and hurried, until she reached the top of the Place de Grève. She stopped from time to time, placed her hand upon her heart, leaned against a wall until she could breathe freely again, and then continued her course more rapidly than before. On reaching the Place de Grève, La Vallière suddenly came upon a group of three drunken men, dishevelled and reeling and staggering along, who were just leaving a boat, which they had made fast to the quay; the boat was freighted with wines, and it was apparent that they had done complete justice to the merchandise. They were singing their convivial exploits in three different keys, when suddenly, as they reached the end of the railing leading down to the quay, they all at once found themselves obstructing the path of this young girl. La Vallière stopped; while they on their side, at the appearance of the young girl dressed in court costume, also halted, and with one accord, seizing each other by the hand, they surrounded La Vallière, singing,—

> "Oh, you who sadly are wandering alone,
> Come, come, and laugh with us!"

La Vallière at once understood that the men were addressing her, and wished to prevent her from passing; she made many efforts to escape, but they were useless. Her limbs failed her; she felt that she was on the point of falling, and uttered a cry of terror. But at the same moment the circle which surrounded her was suddenly broken through in a most violent manner. One of her insulters was knocked to the left, another fell rolling over and over to the right close to the water's edge, while the third could hardly keep his feet. An officer of the musketeers stood face to face with the young girl, with frowning brow, a threat on his lips, and his hand raised to give the threat fulfilment. The drunken fellows, at the sight of the uniform, made their escape with all despatch,—and the greater for the proof of strength which the wearer of the uniform had just afforded them. "*Mordioux!*" exclaimed the musketeer, "it is Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" La Vallière, bewildered by what had

just happened and confounded by hearing her name pronounced, looked up and recognised D'Artagnan.

"Oh, Monsieur, it is indeed I!" and at the same time she seized hold of his arm. "You will protect me, M. d'Artagnan, will you not?" she added, in a tone of entreaty.—"Most certainly I will protect you; but in Heaven's name where are you going at this hour?"—"I am going to Chaillot."—"You are going to Chaillot by the way of La Rapée! Why, Mademoiselle, the truth is that you are turning your back to it."—"In that case, Monsieur, be kind enough to put me in the right way, and to go with me a short distance."—"Most willingly."

"But how does it happen that I find you here? By what merciful direction were you so near at hand to come to my assistance? I almost seem to be dreaming or to be losing my senses."—"I happened to be here, Mademoiselle, because I have a house in the Place de Grève, at the sign of the Notre Dame, the rent of which I went to collect yesterday, and where I in fact passed the night; and I also wished to be at the palace early, for the purpose of inspecting my posts."—"Thank you," said La Vallière.

"That is what *I* was doing," said D'Artagnan to himself; "but what was *she* doing, and why is she going to Chaillot at such an hour?" and he offered her his arm, which she took, and began to walk with increased speed, which concealed, however, great weakness. D'Artagnan perceived it, and proposed to La Vallière that she should rest; but she refused.

"You are ignorant, perhaps, where Chaillot is?" inquired D'Artagnan.—"Quite so."—"It is a great distance."—"That matters very little."—"It is at least a league."—"I can walk it."

D'Artagnan did not reply; he could tell, merely by the tone of a voice, when a resolution was real or not. He rather bore along than accompanied La Vallière, until they perceived the elevated ground of Chaillot. "To what house are you going, Mademoiselle?" inquired D'Artagnan.—"To the Carmelites, Monsieur."

"To the Carmelites?" repeated D'Artagnan, in no little amazement.—"Yes; and since Heaven has directed you to me to give me your support on my road, accept both my thanks and my adieux."—"To the Carmelites! Your adieux! Are you going to become a nun?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Yes, Monsieur."—"What, you!!!" There was in this "you," which we have marked by three notes of exclamation

in order to render it as expressive as possible,—there was, we repeat, in this "you" a complete poem. It recalled to La Vallière her old recollections of Blois and her new recollections of Fontainebleau; it said to her, "*You*, who might be happy with Raoul,—*you*, who might be powerful with Louis,—*you* about to become a nun!"

"Yes, Monsieur," she said; "I am going to devote myself to the service of Heaven, and to renounce the world altogether."—"But are you not mistaken with regard to your vocation,—are you not mistaken in supposing it to be the will of Heaven?"—"No; since Heaven has permitted me to meet you. Had it not been for you, I should certainly have sunk from fatigue on the road; and since Heaven, I repeat, has thrown you in my way, it is because it has willed that I should carry out my intention."

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, doubtingly, "that is a rather subtle argument, I think."—"Whatever it may be," returned the young girl, "I have acquainted you with the steps I have taken, and with my resolution. And now I have one last favour to ask of you, even while I return you my thanks. The king is entirely ignorant of my flight from the Palais-Royal, and is ignorant also of what I am about to do."

"The king ignorant, you say!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Take care, Mademoiselle; you do not consider the import of your action. No one ought to do anything with which the king is unacquainted, especially those who belong to the court."—"I no longer belong to the court, Monsieur." D'Artagnan looked at the young girl with increasing astonishment. "Do not be uneasy, Monsieur!" she continued. "I have well considered everything: and were it not so, it would now be too late to reconsider my resolution,—I have acted upon it."

"Well, Mademoiselle, what do you wish me to do?"—"In the name of that sympathy which misfortune inspires, by your generous feelings, and by your honour as a gentleman, I entreat you to swear to me one thing."—"Name it."—"Swear to me, M. d'Artagnan, that you will not tell the king that you have seen me, and that I am at the Carmelites."—"I will not swear that," said D'Artagnan, shaking his head.

"Why?"—"Because I know the king, I know you, I know myself even,—nay, the whole human race,—too well; no, no, I will not swear that!"—"In that case," cried La Vallière, with an energy of which one would hardly have thought her capable, "instead of the blessing which I should have implored for you

until my dying day, I will invoke a curse, for you are rendering me the most miserable creature that ever lived."

We have already observed that D'Artagnan could easily recognise the accents of truth and sincerity, and he could not resist this last appeal. He saw by her face how bitterly she suffered from a feeling of degradation; he remarked her trembling limbs, how her whole slight and delicate frame was violently agitated by some internal struggle, and clearly perceived that resistance might be fatal. "I will do as you wish, then," he said. "Be satisfied, Mademoiselle; I will say nothing to the king."—"Oh, thank you, thank you!" exclaimed La Vallière; "you are the most generous of men." And in her extreme delight she seized hold of D'Artagnan's hands, and pressed them within her own.

D'Artagnan, who felt himself quite overcome, said: "This is touching, upon my word! Here is one who begins where others leave off." And La Vallière, who in the extremity of her distress had sunk down and seated herself upon a stone, rose and walked towards the convent of the Carmelites, which could be seen looming up in the dawning light. D'Artagnan followed her at a distance. The door of the parlour was half open; she glided in like a shadow, and thanking D'Artagnan by a parting wave of the hand, disappeared from his sight.

When D'Artagnan found himself quite alone, he deliberated profoundly upon what had just taken place. "Upon my word," he said, "this looks very much like what is called a false position. To keep such a secret as that is to keep a burning coal in one's pocket, and trust that it may not burn the stuff. And yet not to keep it when I have sworn to do so is dishonourable. It generally happens that some bright idea or other occurs to me as I am going along; but I am very much mistaken if I shall not now have to go a long way in order to find the solution of this affair. Yes, but which way to go? Oh! towards Paris, of course; that is the best way, after all. Only we must make haste; and in order to make haste, four legs are better than two, and I, unhappily, just now have only two. 'A horse, a horse!' as I heard them say at the theatre in London,—'my kingdom for a horse!' And now I think of it, it need not cost me so much as that, for at the Barrière de la Conférence there is a guard of musketeers; and instead of the one horse I need, I shall there find ten." So, in pursuance of this resolution, which he had adopted with his usual rapidity, D'Artagnan immediately turned his back upon the heights of Chaillot,

reached the guard-house, took the fastest horse he could find there, and was at the palace in ten minutes. It was striking five as he reached the Palais-Royal. The king, he was told, went to bed at his usual hour, after having been engaged with M. Colbert, and in all probability was still fast asleep. "Come," said D'Artagnan, "she spoke the truth, and the king is ignorant of everything; if he only knew one half of what has happened, the Palais-Royal by this time would be turned upside down."

CHAPTER CLXVI

SHOWING HOW LOUIS, ON HIS SIDE, HAD PASSED THE TIME FROM TEN TO HALF-PAST TWELVE AT NIGHT

When the king left the apartment of the maids of honour, he found Colbert awaiting him in his cabinet to receive directions with regard to the next day's ceremony, as the king was then to receive the Dutch and Spanish ambassadors. Louis XIV. had serious causes of dissatisfaction with the Dutch; the States had already been guilty of many mean shifts and evasions in their relations with France, and without perceiving or without caring about the chances of a rupture, had again abandoned the alliance with his Most Christian Majesty, for the purpose of entering into all kinds of plots with Spain.

Louis XIV. at his accession—that is to say, at the death of Mazarin—had found this political question roughly sketched out. The solution was difficult for a young man; but as at that time the king represented the whole nation, anything that he resolved upon, the nation would be found ready to carry out. Any sudden impulse of anger, the reaction of young and hot blood to the brain, would be quite sufficient to change an old form of policy and to create another and a new system altogether. The part that diplomatists had to play in those days was that of arranging among themselves the different *coups-d'état* which their sovereign masters might wish to effect. Louis was not in that calm state of mind in which he could determine upon a wise course of policy. Still much agitated from the quarrel he had just had with La Vallière, he walked hastily into his cabinet, exceedingly desirous of finding an opportunity of producing an explosion after he had controlled himself for so long a time. Colbert, as he saw the king enter, knew the position of affairs at a glance, understood the king's intentions, and

resolved therefore to manœuvre a little. When Louis requested to be informed what it would be necessary to say on the morrow, Colbert began by expressing his surprise that his Majesty had not been properly informed by M. Fouquet. "M. Fouquet," he said, "is perfectly acquainted with the whole of this Dutch affair; he receives all the correspondence himself direct."

The king, who was accustomed to hear M. Colbert find fault with M. Fouquet, allowed this remark to pass by unanswered, and merely listened. Colbert noticed the effect he had produced, and hastened to back out, saying that M. Fouquet was not on all occasions as blamable as at the first glance might seem to be the case, inasmuch as at that moment he was greatly occupied. The king looked up. "To what do you allude?" he said.

"Sire, men are but men, and M. Fouquet has his defects as well as his great qualities."—"Ah! defects,—who is without them, M. Colbert?"—"Your Majesty is not," said Colbert, boldly; for he knew how to convey a good deal of flattery in a light amount of blame, like the arrow which cleaves the air notwithstanding its weight, thanks to the light feathers which bear it up.

The king smiled. "What defect has M. Fouquet, then?" he said. "Still the same, Sire; it is said that he is in love."—"In love! with whom?"—"I am not quite sure, Sire; I have very little to do with matters of gallantry."

"At all events, you know, since you speak of it."—"I have heard a name mentioned."—"Whose?"—"I cannot now remember whose, but I think it is one of Madame's maids of honour." The king started. "You know more than you like to say, M. Colbert," he murmured.—"I assure you, no, Sire."

"At all events Madame's maids of honour are all known; and in mentioning their names to you, you will perhaps recollect the one to which you allude."—"No, Sire."—"At least, try!"—"It would be useless, Sire. Whenever the name of any compromised lady is concerned, my memory is like a coffer of brass, the key of which I have lost."

A dark cloud seemed to pass over the mind as well as across the face of the king; then, wishing to appear master of himself, he said, shaking his head, "And now for the affair concerning Holland."

"In the first place, Sire, at what hour will your Majesty receive the ambassadors?"—"Early in the morning."—"Eleven o'clock?"—"That is too late,—say nine o'clock."—"That will be too early, Sire."—"For friends, that would be

a matter of no importance,—one does what one likes with one's friends; but for one's enemies, in that case nothing could be better than if they were to feel hurt. I should not be sorry, I confess, to have to finish altogether with these marsh-birds, who annoy me with their cries."

"It shall be as your Majesty desires. At nine o'clock, therefore,—I will give the necessary orders. Is it to be a formal audience?"—"No. I wish to have an explanation with them, and not to embitter matters,—a thing that happens always when many persons are present; but at the same time I wish to clear everything with them, in order not to have to begin over again."—"Your Majesty will inform me of the persons whom you wish to be present at the reception."

"I will make a list of them. Let us speak of the ambassadors; what do they want?"—"Allies with Spain, they gain nothing; allies with France, they lose much."—"How is that?"—"Allied with Spain, they see themselves bounded and protected by the possessions of their allies; they cannot touch them, however anxious they may be to do so. From Antwerp to Rotterdam is but a step, and that by way of the Scheldt and the Meuse. If they wish to make a bite at the Spanish cake, you, Sire, the son-in-law of the King of Spain, could with your cavalry go from your dominions to Brussels in two days. Their design is, therefore, only to quarrel so far with you, and only to make you suspect Spain so far, that you will not interfere with their own affairs."

"It would be far more simple, then, I should think," replied the king, "to form a solid alliance with me, by means of which I should gain something, while they would gain everything."—"Not so; for if by chance they were to have you, or France rather, as a boundary, your Majesty is not an agreeable neighbour; young, ardent, warlike, the King of France might inflict some serious mischief on Holland, especially if he were to get near her."—"I perfectly understand, M. Colbert, and you have explained it very clearly; but be good enough to tell me the conclusion you have reached."—"Your Majesty's own decisions are never deficient in wisdom."

"What will these ambassadors say to me?"—"They will tell your Majesty that they are ardently desirous of forming an alliance with you, which will be a falsehood; they will tell the Spaniards that the three powers ought to unite so as to check the prosperity of England, and that will equally be a falsehood; for at present the natural ally of your Majesty is England, who

has ships when you have none,—England, who can counteract Dutch influence in India,—England, in fact, a monarchical country, to which your Majesty is attached by ties of relationship."

"Good; but how would you answer?"—"I should answer, Sire, with the greatest possible moderation of tone, that Holland is not perfectly well disposed towards the King of France; that the symptoms of public feeling among the Dutch are alarming as regards your Majesty; that certain medals have been struck with insulting devices."

"Towards me!" exclaimed the young king, excitedly.—"Oh, no, Sire, no! 'insulting' is not the word. I was mistaken; I ought to have said 'immeasurably flattering for the Batavians.'"—"Oh, if that be so, the pride of the Batavians is a matter of indifference to me," said the king, sighing.—"Your Majesty is right, a thousand times right. However, it is never bad policy, your Majesty knows better than myself, to be unjust in order to obtain a concession. If your Majesty were to complain irascibly of the Dutch, you would appear to them of more considerable importance."—"What are those medals of which you speak?" inquired Louis; "for if I allude to them, I ought to know what to say."—"Upon my word, Sire, I cannot very well tell you,—some overweeningly conceited device,—that is the sense of it; the words have nothing to do with the thing itself."—"Very good, I will mention the word 'medal,' and they can understand it if they like."—"Oh, they will understand! Your Majesty can also slip in a few words about certain pamphlets which are in circulation."—"Never! Pamphlets befoul those who write them much more than those against whom they are written. M. Colbert, I thank you; you can leave me now. Do not forget the hour I have fixed, and be there yourself."

"Sire, I await your Majesty's list."—"True," returned the king; and he began to meditate. He did not think of the list in the slightest degree. The clock struck half-past eleven. The king's face revealed a violent conflict between pride and love. The political conversation had dispelled a good deal of the irritation which Louis had felt; and La Vallière's pale, worn features to his imagination spoke a very different language from that of the Dutch medals or the Batavian pamphlets. He sat for ten minutes debating within himself whether he should or should not return to La Vallière; but Colbert having respectfully insisted on having the list, the king blushed at thinking

of love when business required his attention. He therefore dictated: the queen-mother, the queen, Madame, Madame de Motteville, Mademoiselle de Châtillon, Madame de Navailles; and for the men, Monsieur, Monsieur the Prince, M. de Grammont, M. de Manicamp, M. de Saint-Aignan, and the officers on duty. —"The ministers?" said Colbert.—"As a matter of course, and the secretaries also."

"Sire, I will go and prepare everything; the orders will be at the different residences to-morrow."—"Say rather to-day," replied Louis mournfully, as the clock struck twelve. It was the very hour when poor La Vallière was almost dying from anguish and bitter suffering. The king's attendants entered, it being the hour of his retiring to rest; the queen, indeed, had been waiting for more than an hour. Louis accordingly retired to his bedroom with a sigh; but as he sighed, he congratulated himself on his courage, and applauded himself for having been as firm in love as in affairs of State.

CHAPTER CLXVII

THE AMBASSADORS

D'Artagnan had, with very few exceptions, learned all the particulars of what we have just been relating; for among his friends he reckoned all the useful, serviceable people in the royal household,—officious attendants, who were proud of being recognised by the captain of the musketeers, for the captain's influence was very great; and then, in addition to any ambitious views they may have had, they were proud of the worth implied in a recognition by a man as brave as D'Artagnan. In this manner D'Artagnan learned every morning what he had not been able either to see or to ascertain the night before, from the simple fact of his not being ubiquitous; so that, with the information he had been able by his own means to pick up during the day, and with what he had gathered from others, he succeeded in making up a bundle of weapons, which he untied as occasion might require to choose such as he judged necessary; his two eyes rendered him the same service as the hundred eyes of Argus. Political secrets, private secrets, hints or scraps of conversation dropped by the courtiers on the threshold of the royal antechamber,—he managed to discover and to put away

everything in the vast and impenetrable tomb of his memory, by the side of those royal secrets so dearly bought and faithfully preserved.

D'Artagnan therefore knew of the king's interview with Colbert, and of the appointment made for the ambassadors in the morning, and consequently he knew that the question of the medals would be brought up; and while he was constructing a conversation upon a few chance words which had reached his ears, he returned to his post in the royal apartments, so as to be there at the moment the king should awake. It happened that the king woke very early,—proving thereby that he too, on his side, had slept but indifferently. Towards seven o'clock he half opened his door very gently. D'Artagnan was at his post. His Majesty was pale, and seemed wearied; he had not, moreover, quite finished dressing. "Send for M. de Saint-Aignan," he said.

De Saint-Aignan very probably was waiting for a summons; for the messenger, when he reached his apartment, found him already dressed. De Saint-Aignan hastened to the king in obedience to the summons. A moment afterwards the king and De Saint-Aignan passed by together, but the king walking first. D'Artagnan went to the window which looked out upon the courtyards; he had no need to put himself to the trouble of watching in what direction the king went, for he had no difficulty in guessing beforehand where his Majesty was going. The king, in fact, went towards the apartments of the maids of honour,—a circumstance which in no way astonished D'Artagnan, for he more than suspected, although La Vallière had not breathed a syllable on the subject, that the king had some kind of reparation to make. De Saint-Aignan followed him, as he had done the previous evening, rather less uneasy in his mind though still slightly agitated; for he trusted that at seven o'clock in the morning there might be only himself and the king awake among the august guests at the palace.

D'Artagnan stood at the window, calm and careless. One could almost have sworn that he noticed nothing, and was utterly ignorant who were these two hunters after adventures who were passing across the courtyards wrapped up in their cloaks. And yet all the while that D'Artagnan appeared not to be looking at them at all, he did not for one moment lose sight of them, and while he whistled that old march of the musketeers, which he rarely recalled except under great emergencies, he conjectured and prophesied how terrible would be

the storm which would be raised on the king's return. In fact, when the king entered La Vallière's apartment and found the room empty and the bed untouched, he began to be alarmed, and called out to Montalais, who immediately rushed in; but her astonishment was equal to the king's. All that she could tell his Majesty was that she had fancied she had heard La Vallière weep during a portion of the night, but knowing that his Majesty had returned, she had not dared to inquire what was the matter.

"But," inquired the king, "where do you suppose she has gone?"—"Sire," replied Montalais, "Louise is of a very sentimental disposition, and often have I seen her rise before daybreak in order to go out into the garden; she may perhaps be there now." This appeared probable, and the king immediately ran down the staircase in order to go in search of the fugitive. D'Artagnan observed that he was very pale, while talking excitedly with his companion, as he went towards the gardens, De Saint-Aignan following him, quite out of breath. D'Artagnan did not stir from the window, but went on whistling, looking as if he saw nothing and yet seeing everything. "Well, well," he murmured, when the king had disappeared, "his Majesty's passion is stronger than I thought; he is now doing, I think, what he never did for Mademoiselle de Mancini."

In a quarter of an hour the king again appeared; he had looked everywhere, was completely out of breath, and as a matter of course had not discovered anything. De Saint-Aignan, who still followed him, was fanning himself with his hat, and in a gasping voice asking for information from such of the servants as were about,—in fact, from every one he met. He met Manicamp, who had arrived from Fontainebleau by easy stages; for while the others had performed the journey in six hours, he had taken four-and-twenty.

"Have you seen Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" De Saint-Aignan asked him. Whereupon Manicamp, dreamy and absent as usual, answered, thinking that some one was asking him about De Guiche, "Thank you, the count is a little better." And he continued on his way until he reached the antechamber where D'Artagnan was, whom he asked to explain how it was that the king looked, as he thought, so wild; to which D'Artagnan replied that he was quite mistaken,—that the king, on the contrary, was as lively and merry as he could possibly be.

In the midst of all this, eight o'clock struck. It was usual for the king to take his breakfast at this hour, for the code of

etiquette prescribed that the king should always be hungry at eight o'clock. His breakfast was laid upon a small table in his bedroom, and he ate very fast. De Saint-Aignan, of whom he would not lose sight, held the napkin for him. He then disposed of several military audiences, during which he despatched De Saint-Aignan to see what he could find out. Then, while he was still preoccupied, still anxious, still watching for De Saint-Aignan's return, who had sent out his servants in every direction to make inquiries, and had also gone himself, the hour of nine struck, and the king forthwith passed into his cabinet.

At the first stroke of the clock the ambassadors themselves entered; and as it finished striking, the two queens and Madame made their appearance. There were three ambassadors from Holland, and two from Spain. The king glanced at them, and then bowed; and at the same moment De Saint-Aignan entered, an entrance which the king regarded as far more important though in a different way than that of the ambassadors, however numerous they were, and from whatever country they came; and so, setting everything else aside, the king made a sign of interrogation to De Saint-Aignan, which the latter answered by a most decisive negative. The king almost entirely lost his courage; but as the queens, the members of the nobility who were present, and the ambassadors had their eyes fixed upon him, he overcame his emotion by a violent effort, and invited the latter to speak. Whereupon one of the Spanish deputies made a long oration, in which he boasted the advantages that the Spanish alliance would offer. The king interrupted him, saying, "Monsieur, I trust that whatever is advantageous for France must be exceedingly advantageous for Spain." This remark, and particularly the peremptory tone in which it was pronounced, made the ambassadors turn pale, and brought the colour into the cheeks of the two queens, who both, being Spanish, felt their pride of relationship and nationality wounded by this reply.

The Dutch ambassador then began to speak in his turn, and complained of the prejudice which the king exhibited against the government of his country. The king interrupted him, saying, "It is very singular, Monsieur, that you should come with any complaint, when it is I, rather, who have reason to complain; and yet, you see, I do not."—"Complain, Sire?" asked the gentleman from Holland, "and in what respect?"

The king smiled bitterly. "Will you blame me, Monsieur,"

he said, "if I should happen to entertain suspicions against a government which authorises and protects public insulters?"—"Sire!"—"I tell you," resumed the king, exciting himself from his own personal annoyance rather than from political grounds, "that Holland is a land of refuge for all who hate me, and especially for all who malign me."—"Oh, Sire!—"—"You wish for proofs, perhaps? Very good; they can be had easily enough. Whence proceed all those insulting pamphlets which represent me as a monarch without glory and without authority? Your printing-presses groan under their number. If my secretaries were here, I would mention the titles of the works as well as the names of the printers."

"Sire," replied the ambassador, "a pamphlet cannot be regarded as the work of a nation. Is it just, is it reasonable, that a great and powerful monarch like your Majesty should render a whole people responsible for the crime of a few madmen, who are dying of hunger?"—"That may be the case, I admit, Monsieur. But when the mint at Amsterdam strikes off medals which reflect disgrace upon me, is that also the crime of a few madmen?"—"Medals?" stammered the ambassador.—"Medals," repeated the king, looking at Colbert.—"Your Majesty," the ambassador ventured, "should be quite sure—"

The king still looked at Colbert; but Colbert appeared not to understand him, and maintained an unbroken silence, notwithstanding the king's repeated hints. D'Artagnan then approached the king, and taking a piece of money out of his pocket placed it in the king's hands, saying, "That is the medal to which your Majesty alludes."

The king looked at it, and with a glance which ever since he had become his own master had been always soaring in its gaze, could observe an insulting device representing Holland, like Joshua, arresting the progress of the sun, with this inscription, *In conspectu meo stetit sol.* "'In my presence the sun stands still,'" exclaimed the king, furiously. "Ah, you will hardly deny it, now, I trust!"—"And the sun," said D'Artagnan, "is this," as he pointed to the panels of the cabinet, where the sun was brilliantly represented in every direction with this motto, *Nec pluribus impar.*

Louis's anger, increased by the bitterness of his own personal sufferings, hardly required this additional circumstance to foment it. Every one saw, from the kindling passion in the king's eyes, that an explosion was most imminent. A look from Colbert kept the storm from bursting forth. The ambas-

sador ventured to frame excuses by saying that the vanity of nations was a matter of little consequence; that Holland was proud that with such limited resources she had maintained her rank as a great nation, even against powerful monarchs; and that if a little smoke had intoxicated his countrymen, the king would be so gracious as to excuse this intoxication.

The king seemed seeking for advice. He looked at Colbert, who remained impassive; then at D'Artagnan, who simply shrugged his shoulders,—a movement which was like the opening of the flood-gates whereby the king's anger, which he had restrained for so long, was set free. As no one knew what direction his anger might take, all preserved a dead silence. The second ambassador took advantage of it to begin his excuses also. While he was speaking, and while the king, who had again gradually returned to his own personal reflections, listened to the voice, full of nervous anxiety, with the air of an absent man listening to the murmuring of a cascade, D'Artagnan, on whose left hand De Saint-Aignan was standing, approached the latter, and in a voice well calculated to reach the king's ears, said, "Have you heard the news, Count?"—"What news?" said De Saint-Aignan.—"Why, about La Vallière?"

The king started, and involuntarily advanced a step nearer to them. "What has happened to La Vallière?" inquired De Saint-Aignan, in a tone which can very easily be imagined.—"Ah, poor girl!" said D'Artagnan; "she is going to take the veil."

"The veil!" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan.—"The veil!" cried the king, in the midst of the ambassador's discourse; but then, mindful of the rules of etiquette, he mastered himself, still listening however with rapt attention.—"What order?" inquired De Saint-Aignan.—"The Carmelites of Chaillot."—"Who the deuce told you that?"—"She did herself."—"You have seen her, then?"—"It was I who escorted her to the Carmelites."

The king did not lose a word; his blood boiled within him, and his face began to flush. "But what was the cause of her flight?" inquired De Saint-Aignan.—"Because the poor girl was driven away from the court yesterday," replied D'Artagnan.

He had no sooner said this than the king, with an authoritative gesture, said to the ambassador, "Enough, Monsieur, enough!" Then, advancing towards the captain, he exclaimed, "Who says that La Vallière is going to take the religious vows?"—"M. d'Artagnan," answered the favourite.—"Is it

true what you say?" said the king, turning towards the musketeer.—"As true as truth itself."

The king clinched his hands, and turned pale. "You added something further, M. d'Artagnan," he said.—"I know nothing more, Sire."—"You added that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had been driven away from the court."—"Yes, Sire."—"Is that true, also?"—"Ascertain it for yourself, Sire."—"And from whom?"—"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, like a man declining to say anything further.

The king gave a violent start, regardless of ambassadors, ministers, courtiers, and politics. The queen-mother rose; she had heard everything, or if she had not heard everything, she had guessed it. Madame, almost fainting from anger and fear, endeavoured to rise as the queen-mother had done; but she sank down again upon her chair, which by an involuntary movement she made roll back. "Messieurs," said the king, "the audience is over. I will communicate my answer, or rather my will, to Spain and to Holland;" and with an imperious gesture he dismissed the ambassadors.

"Take care, my son," said the queen-mother, indignantly, "take care! You are hardly master of yourself, I think."—"Ah, Madame," roared the young lion, with a terrible gesture, "if I am not master of myself, I will be, I promise you, of those who do me outrage! Come with me, M. d'Artagnan, come!" and he left the room in the midst of general stupefaction and dismay.

The king hastily descended the staircase, and was about to cross the courtyard. "Sire," said D'Artagnan, "your Majesty mistakes the way."—"No; I am going to the stables."—"That is useless, Sire, for I have horses ready for your Majesty." The king's only answer was a look; but this look promised more than the ambition of three D'Artagnans could have dared to hope.

CHAPTER CLXVIII

CHAILLOT

ALTHOUGH they had not been summoned, Manicamp and Malicorne had followed the king and D'Artagnan. They were both exceedingly intelligent men, except that Malicorne was often too precipitate, owing to his ambition, while Manicamp was frequently too tardy, owing to his indolence. On this occasion however, they seized the proper moment. Five horses were waiting in readiness. Two were taken by the king and D'Artagnan, two others by Manicamp and Malicorne, while a groom belonging to the stables mounted the fifth. The whole cavalcade set off at a gallop. D'Artagnan had been very careful in his selection of the horses; they were the very horses for distressed lovers,—horses which not simply ran, but flew. Within ten minutes after their departure, the cavalcade, amid a cloud of dust, arrived at Chaillot. The king literally threw himself off his horse; but notwithstanding his rapidity of movement, he found D'Artagnan already at his horse's bridle. With a sign of acknowledgment to the musketeer, he threw the bridle to the groom, then darted into the vestibule, violently pushed open the door, and entered the reception-room. Manicamp, Malicorne, and the groom remained outside, D'Artagnan alone following his master. When he entered the reception-room, the first object which met his gaze was Louise herself, not on her knees, but lying at the foot of a large stone crucifix.

The young girl was stretched upon the damp flag-stones, scarcely visible in the gloom of the apartment, which was lighted only by means of a narrow window, protected by bars, and completely shaded by climbing plants. She was alone, inanimate, cold as the stone upon which her body lay. When the king saw her in this state he thought she was dead, and uttered a terrible cry, which made D'Artagnan hurry into the room. The king had already passed an arm round her body, and D'Artagnan assisted him in raising the poor girl, of whom the torpor of death seemed already to have taken possession. The king then took her wholly into his arms, and tried to warm with his kisses her icy hands and temples.

D'Artagnan seized the call-bell, and rang with all his might. The Carmelite Sisters immediately hastened at the summons,

and uttered loud exclamations of alarm and indignation at the sight of the two men holding a woman in their arms. The superior also hurried in; but far more a creature of the world than any of the female members of the court, notwithstanding her austerity, she recognised the king at the first glance, by the respect which those present exhibited for him, as well as by the imperious and authoritative way in which he had thrown the whole establishment into confusion. As soon as she saw the king, she retired to her own apartments, in order to avoid compromising her dignity. But by the nuns she sent various cordials,—Queen of Hungary water, balm, etc.,—and ordered that all the doors should be immediately closed,—a command which was just in time, for the king's distress was fast becoming of a most clamorous and despairing character. He had almost decided to send for his own physician, when La Vallière exhibited signs of returning animation. The first object which met her gaze, as she opened her eyes, was the king at her feet. In all probability she did not recognise him, for she uttered a deep sigh of anguish and distress. Louis fixed his eyes devouringly upon her face; and when in the course of a few moments her wandering looks returned to the king, she recognised him and endeavoured to tear herself from his embrace.

"Oh, heavens!" she murmured, "is not the sacrifice yet made?"—"No, no!" exclaimed the king; "and it shall not be made, I swear." Notwithstanding her weakness and utter despair, she rose from the ground, saying, "It must be made, however,—it must be; so do not stay me in my purpose!"—"I leave you to sacrifice yourself!—I! Never, never!" exclaimed the king.

"Well," murmured D'Artagnan, "I may as well go now. As soon as they begin to speak, we will spare them our ears;" and he left the room, leaving the two lovers alone.

"Sire," continued La Vallière, "not another word, I implore you! Do not destroy the only future I can hope for,—my salvation; do not destroy the glory and brightness of your own future for a mere caprice."—"A caprice!" cried the king.—"Oh, Sire, it is now only that I can clearly see into your heart!"—"You, Louise? What do you mean?"

"An inexplicable and unreasonable impulse may momentarily appear to offer a sufficient excuse for your conduct; but there are duties imposed upon you which are incompatible with your regard for a poor girl such as I am. So forget me!"—"I forget you!"—"You have already done so."—"Rather would I die!"

"Sire, you cannot love one whose peace of mind you hold so lightly, and whom you so cruelly abandoned last night to the bitterness of death."—"What can you mean? Explain yourself, Louise!"—"What did you ask me yesterday morning? To love you. What did you promise me in return? Never to let midnight pass without offering me an opportunity of reconciliation whenever your anger might be aroused against me."—"Oh, forgive me, Louise, forgive me! I was almost mad from jealousy."—"Jealousy is an unworthy sentiment, Sire, which springs up like tares that have been cut down. You may become jealous again, and will end by killing me. Be merciful, then, and leave me now to die!"

"Another word, Mademoiselle, in that strain, and you will see me expire at your feet!"—"No, no, Sire, I am better acquainted with my own demerits. Believe me, and do not sacrifice yourself for an unhappy girl whom all despise."—"Oh, name those whom you accuse, name them!"—"I have no complaints, Sire, to prefer against any one, no one but myself to accuse. Farewell, Sire! You are compromising yourself in speaking to me in such a manner."

"Oh, be careful, Louise, in what you say; for you are reducing me to the very depths of despair."—"Oh, Sire, Sire, leave me to the protection of Heaven, I implore you!"—"Heaven itself shall not tear you from me."

"Save me, then," cried the poor girl, "from those determined and pitiless enemies who are thirsting to destroy my very life and honour too. If you have courage enough to love me, show at least that you have power enough to defend me. But, no; she whom you say you love, others insult and mock, and drive away in disgrace;" and the gentle-hearted girl, forced by her own bitter distress to accuse others, wrung her hands in an uncontrollable agony of tears.

"You have been driven away!" exclaimed the king. "This is the second time I have heard that said."—"I have been driven away with shame and ignominy, Sire. You see, then, that I have no other protector but Heaven, no consolation but prayer, and that this cloister is my only refuge."—"My palace, my whole court, shall be yours. Oh, fear nothing further now, Louise! Those who yesterday drove you away, be they men or women, shall to-morrow tremble before you. To-morrow, do I say? Nay, this very day have I already shown my displeasure,—have I already threatened. It is in my power, even now, to hurl the thunderbolt which I have hitherto withheld.

Louise, Louise, you shall be cruelly avenged; tears of blood shall repay your tears. Give me only the names of your enemies."

"Never, never!"—"How can I show my anger, then?"—"Sire, those upon whom your anger would have to fall would force you to withhold your hand."—"Oh, you do not know me!" cried the king, exasperated. "Rather than draw back, I would sacrifice my kingdom and curse my family. Yes, I would even destroy this arm, if it were so cowardly as not to annihilate all those who had ventured to make themselves the enemies of the gentlest and best of creatures;" and as he said these words, Louis struck his fist violently against the oaken wainscoting, which returned an ominous sound.

La Vallière was alarmed, for the wrath of this all-powerful young man had something imposing and threatening in it, and, like that of the tempest, might be mortal in its effects. She, who thought that her own sufferings could not be surpassed, was overwhelmed by a suffering which revealed itself by menace and by violence. "Sire," she said, "for the last time I implore you to leave me! Already do I feel strengthened by the calm seclusion of this asylum; and I feel more calm under the protection of Heaven, for all the petty human meannesses of this world are forgotten beneath the Divine protection. Once more, then, Sire, I implore you to leave me to my God!"

"Confess, rather," cried Louis, "that you have never loved me; admit that my humility and my repentance are flattering to your pride, but that my distress affects you not; admit that the king of France is no longer regarded as a lover whose tenderness of devotion is capable of working out your happiness, but that he is a despot whose caprice has utterly destroyed in your heart the very last fibre of tender feeling. Do not say that you are seeking Heaven; say rather that you are fleeing from the king. No, Heaven is not accessory to relentless vows: it receives penitence and remorse; it pardons, it is indulgent to love."

Louise's heart was wrung within her, as she listened to his passionate utterance, which made the fever of passion course through every vein in her body. "But did you not hear me say that I have been driven away, scorned, despised?"—"I will make you the most respected, the most adored, and the most envied of my whole court."—"Prove to me that you have not ceased to love me."—"In what way?"—"By leaving me."—"I will prove it to you by never leaving you again."

"But do you imagine, Sire, that I shall allow that,—do you imagine that I will let you come to an open rupture with every

member of your family,—do you imagine that for my sake I will let you abandon mother, wife, and sister? "—" Ah, you have named them, then, at last; it is they, then, who have wrought this grievous injury! By the Heaven above us, I will punish them."—" That is the reason why the future terrifies me, why I refuse everything, why I do not wish you to avenge me. Tears enough have already been shed, sufficient sorrow and affliction have already been occasioned. Oh, never will I be the cause of sorrow or affliction or distress to any one, whoever it may be; for I have mourned and suffered and wept too much myself!"

" And do you count my sufferings, my distress, and my tears as nothing? "—" In Heaven's name, Sire, do not speak to me in that manner! I need all my courage to enable me to accomplish the sacrifice."—" Louise, Louise, I implore you! Command, dictate, avenge yourself, or pardon; but do not abandon me! "—" Alas, Sire, we must part! "—" You do not love me, then! "—" Heaven knows I do! "—" It is false, Louise; it is false."

" Oh, Sire, if I did not love you, I should let you do what you please,—I should let you revenge me, in return for the insult which has been inflicted on me,—I should accept the sweet triumph to my pride which you propose; and yet you cannot deny that I reject even the sweet compensation which your affection affords,—that affection which for me is life itself, for I wished to die when I thought that you loved me no longer." —" Yes, yes, I now know, I now perceive it; you are the holiest, the most adorable of women. There is no one so worthy as yourself, not alone of my own respect and devotion, but also of the respect and devotion of all who surround me; and therefore shall no one be loved like yourself, Louise,—no one shall ever possess the influence over me that you wield. Yes, I swear to you, I would dash society to pieces like a glass, if it should hinder me. You wish me to be calm, to forgive; be it so, I will calm myself. You wish to reign by gentleness and clemency; I will be clement and gentle. Dictate for me the conduct you wish me to adopt, and I will obey blindly."

" In Heaven's name, no, Sire! What am I, a poor girl, to dictate a syllable to so great a monarch as yourself? "—" You are my life and my soul! Is it not the soul that rules the body? "—" You love me, then, Sire? "—" On my knees, with my hands upraised to you, with all the strength and power which Heaven has given me. I love you so deeply that I would happily lay down my life for you at your merest wish."

"Oh, Sire, now that I know you love me, I have nothing more to wish for in the whole world! Give me your hand, Sire; and then farewell! I have enjoyed in this life all the happiness which was my due."—"Oh, no! Say only that your life is beginning. Your happiness is not a happiness of yesterday; it is of to-day, of to-morrow, ever-enduring. The future is yours; everything which is mine is yours too. Away with these ideas of separation! Away with these gloomy, despairing thoughts! You will live for me, as I will live for you, Louise!" and he threw himself at her feet, embracing her knees with the wildest transports of joy and gratitude.

"Oh, Sire, Sire! all that is but a wild dream."—"Why a wild dream?"—"Because I cannot return to the court. Exiled, how can I see you again? Would it not be far better to bury myself in a cloister, with the rich consolation that your affection gives me, with the latest pulses of your heart beating for me, and your latest confession of love still ringing in my ears?"

"Exiled,—you!" exclaimed Louis XIV.; "and who exiles when I recall?"—"Oh, Sire, something which rules superior to kings even,—the world and public opinion. Reflect for a moment! You cannot love a woman who has been ignominiously driven away,—one whom your mother has stained with suspicion, one whom your sister has disgraced with punishment; such a woman, indeed, would be unworthy of you."

"Unworthy!—one who belongs to me?"—"Yes, Sire, precisely on that account; from the very moment when she belongs to you, your mistress is unworthy."—"You are right, Louise; every shade of delicacy of feeling is yours. Very well, you shall not be exiled."

"Ah, you have not heard Madame; that is very clear."—"I will appeal from her to my mother."—"Again, Sire, you have not seen your mother."—"She, also! Poor Louise! every one's hand, then, is against you."—"Yes, yes, poor Louise, who was already bending beneath the fury of the storm, when you arrived and crushed her beneath the weight of your displeasure."—"Oh, forgive me!"—"You will not, I know, be able to make either of them yield. Believe me, the evil cannot be repaired, for I will not allow you to use violence or to exercise your authority."

"Very well, Louise, to prove to you how fondly I love you, I will do one thing,—I will see Madame; I will make her revoke her sentence, I will compel her to do so."—"Compel? Oh, no, no!"—"True; you are right. I will bend her." Louise shook

her head. "I will entreat her, if it be necessary," said Louis. "Will you believe in my affection after that?" Louise drew herself up. "Oh, never, never shall you humiliate yourself on my account; rather, a thousand times, would I die!"

Louis reflected; his features assumed a dark expression. "I will love as much as you have loved," he said; "I will suffer as keenly as you have suffered; this shall be my expiation in your eyes. Come, Mademoiselle, let us put aside these paltry considerations; let us show ourselves as great as our sufferings, as strong as our affection for each other;" and as he said this, he took her in his arms, and encircled her waist with both his hands, saying, "My own love! my life! follow me."

She made a final effort, in which she concentrated no longer all her firmness of will, for that had long since been overcome, but all her physical strength. "No!" she replied weakly, "no, no! I should die of shame."—"No! you shall return like a queen. No one knows that you have left,—except, indeed, D'Artagnan."—"He has betrayed me, then?"—"In what way?"—"He promised me faithfully—"

"I promised not to say anything to the king," said D'Artagnan, showing his keen face through the half-open door, "and I kept my word. I was speaking to M. de Saint-Aignan; and it was not my fault if the king overheard me, was it, Sire?"—"It is quite true," said the king; "forgive him."

La Vallière smiled, and held out her small white hand to the musketeer. "M. d'Artagnan," said the king, delighted, "be good enough to see if you can find a carriage for Mademoiselle de la Vallière."—"Sire," replied the captain, "the carriage is waiting."—"Well, there is a model servant!" exclaimed the king.—"You have taken a long time to find it out," muttered D'Artagnan, notwithstanding he was flattered by the praise bestowed upon him.

La Vallière was overcome; after a little further hesitation she allowed herself to be led away, half fainting, by her royal lover. But as she was on the point of leaving the room, she tore herself from the king's grasp, and returned to the stone crucifix, which she kissed, saying, "O Heaven! it was thou who drewest me hither, thou who hast rejected me; but thy grace is infinite. Whenever I shall again return, forget that I have ever separated myself from thee; for when I return, it will be—never to leave thee again."

The king could not restrain his emotion, and D'Artagnan, even, wiped away a tear. Louis bore the young girl away,

lifted her into the carriage, and directed D'Artagnan to seat himself beside her; while he, mounting his horse, spurred violently towards the Palais-Royal, where immediately on his arrival he sent to request an audience of Madame.

CHAPTER CLXIX

MADAME

From the manner in which the king had dismissed the ambassadors, even the least clear-sighted persons had imagined war would ensue. The ambassadors themselves, but slightly acquainted with the king's domestic affairs, had interpreted as directed against themselves the celebrated sentence: "If I be not master of myself, I at least will be so of those who do me outrage." Happily for the destinies of France and Holland, Colbert had followed them out of the king's presence for the purpose of explaining matters to them; but the two queens and Madame, who were perfectly aware of every circumstance that had taken place in their own households, having heard the remark so full of dark meaning, retired to their own apartments in no little fear and chagrin. Madame especially felt that the royal anger might fall upon her; and as she was brave and exceedingly proud, instead of seeking support from the queen-mother, she had returned to her own apartments, if not without some uneasiness, at least without any intention of avoiding the encounter.

Anne of Austria from time to time, at frequent intervals, sent messengers to learn if the king had returned. The silence which the whole palace preserved upon the matter and upon Louise's disappearance was indicative of a long train of misfortunes to all those who knew the haughty and irritable humour of the king. But Madame, remaining firm in spite of all the flying rumours, shut herself up in her apartments, called Montalais to her, and with a voice as calm as she could possibly command, desired her to relate all she knew about the event itself. Just as the eloquent Montalais was concluding with all kinds of oratorical precautions, and was recommending that Madame should show forbearance towards La Vallière, M. Malicorne made his appearance to beg an audience of Madame, on behalf of his Majesty. Montalais's worthy friend bore upon his countenance all the

signs of the very liveliest emotion. It was impossible to be mistaken; the interview which the king requested would be one of the most interesting chapters in the history of the hearts of kings and of men.

Madame was disturbed by her brother-in-law's arrival; she did not expect it so soon, nor had she, indeed, expected any direct step on Louis's part. Besides, all women, who wage war so successfully by indirect means, are invariably neither very skilful nor very strong when it becomes a question of accepting a pitched battle. Madame, however, was not one who ever drew back,—she had the very opposite defect or qualification, in whichever light it may be considered; she took an exaggerated view of what constituted real courage; and therefore the king's message, of which Malicorne had been the bearer, produced the effect upon her of the trumpet proclaiming the beginning of hostilities. She therefore boldly accepted the gage of battle. Five minutes afterwards the king ascended the staircase. His colour was heightened from having ridden hard. His dusty and disordered clothes formed a singular contrast with the fresh and perfectly arranged toilet of Madame, who however turned pale under the rouge as he entered. Louis lost no time in approaching the object of his visit; he sat down, and Montalais disappeared. Madame seated herself opposite the king.

"My dear sister," said the king, "you are aware that Mademoiselle de la Vallière fled from her own room this morning, and that she has retired to a cloister, overwhelmed by grief and despair." As he pronounced these words, the king's voice was singularly moved. "Your Majesty is the first to inform me of it," replied Madame.—"I should have thought that you might have learned it this morning, during the reception of the ambassadors," said the king.—"From your emotion, Sire, I imagined that something extraordinary had happened, but did not know what it was."

The king, with his usual frankness, went straight to the point. "My sister," said he, "why have you sent Mademoiselle de la Vallière away?"—"Because I had reason to be dissatisfied with her service," replied Madame, dryly.

The king became crimson, and his eyes kindled with a fire which it required all Madame's courage to endure. He mastered his anger, however, and continued: "A stronger reason than that is surely requisite, my sister, for one so good and kind as you are, to turn away and dishonour, not only the young girl

herself, but every member of her family as well. You know that the whole city has its eyes fixed upon the conduct of the female portion of the court. To dismiss a maid of honour is to attribute a crime to her—at the very least, a fault. Of what crime, what fault, has Mademoiselle de la Vallière been guilty?" —"Since you constitute yourself the protector of Mademoiselle de la Vallière," replied Madame, coldly, "I will give you those explanations which I should have a perfect right to withhold from every one."—"Even from the king!" exclaimed Louis, as with a sudden gesture he replaced his hat on his head.—"You have called me your sister," said Madame, "and I am in my own apartments."—"It matters not," said the youthful monarch, ashamed at having been hurried away by his anger; "neither you, Madame, nor any one else in this kingdom, can assert a right to withhold an explanation in my presence."

"Since that is the way you regard it," said Madame, with repressed anger, "all that remains for me to do is to bow to your Majesty, and to be silent."—"No; let there be no equivocation between us."—"The protection with which you surround Mademoiselle de la Vallière does not impose any respect."

"No equivocation, I repeat. You are perfectly aware that as head of the nobility of France I am accountable to all for the honour of every family; you dismiss Mademoiselle de la Vallière, or whoever else it may be—" Madame shrugged her shoulders. "Or whoever else it may be, I repeat," continued the king; "and as in acting in that manner you cast a dishonourable reflection upon that person, I ask you for an explanation, in order that I may confirm or annul the sentence."

"Annul my sentence!" exclaimed Madame, haughtily. "What! when I have discharged one of my attendants, do you order me to take her back again?" The king remained silent. "This would cease to be an excess of power merely, Sire; it would be indecorous and unseemly."—"Madame!"—"As a woman, I should revolt against an abuse so insulting to all propriety; I should no longer be able to regard myself as a princess of your blood, a daughter of a monarch; I should be the meanest of creatures, more humble than the servant I had sent away."

The king rose from his seat with anger. "It cannot be a heart," he cried, "which you have beating in your bosom; if you act in such a way with me, I may have reason to act with similar severity."

It sometimes happens that in a battle a chance ball may

reach its mark. The observation which the king had made without any particular intention struck Madame home, and staggered her for a moment; some day or other she might indeed have reason to dread reprisals. "At all events, Sire," she said, "explain what you require."—"I ask, Madame, what has Mademoiselle de la Vallière done to you?"—"She is the most cunning fomenter of intrigues that I know; she was the occasion of two personal friends engaging in mortal combat, and has made people talk of her in such shameless terms that the whole court is indignant at the mere sound of her name."

"She! she!" cried the king.—"Under her soft and hypocritical manner," continued Madame, "she hides a disposition full of foul and dark deceit."—"She!"—"You may possibly be deceived, Sire, but I know her right well. She is capable of creating dissension between the most affectionate relatives and the most intimate friends. You see that she has already sown discord between us two."—"I do assure you—" said the king.

"Sire, look well into the case as it stood! We were living on the most friendly understanding, and by the artfulness of her tales and complaints she has set your Majesty against me."—"I swear to you," said the king, "that on no occasion has a bitter word ever passed her lips; I swear that even in my wild bursts of passion she would never allow me to menace any one; and I swear, too, that you do not possess a more devoted and respectful friend."

"Friend!" said Madame, with an expression of supreme disdain.—"Take care, Madame!" said the king; "you forget that you now understand me, and that from this moment everything is equalised. Mademoiselle de la Vallière will be whatever I may choose her to become; and to-morrow, if I so determine, she shall be qualified to sit upon a throne."—"She will not have been born to a throne, at least; and whatever you may do can affect the future alone, but cannot affect the past."

"Madame, towards you I have shown every kind consideration and every eager attention; do not remind me that I am master here."—"That is the second time, Sire, that you have made that remark, and I have already had the honour of informing you that I am ready to submit."

"In that case, then, will you confer upon me the favour of receiving Mademoiselle de la Vallière back again?"—"For what purpose, Sire, since you have a throne to bestow upon her? I am too insignificant to protect so exalted a personage."—"A

truce to this bitter and disdainful spirit! Grant me her forgiveness."—"Never!"

"You drive me, then, to open warfare in my own family?"—"I, too, have my own family, where I can find refuge."—"Do you mean that as a threat, and could you forget yourself so far? Do you believe that if you push the affront to that extent, your family would sustain you?"—"I hope, Sire, that you will not force me to take any step which would be unworthy of my rank."—"I hoped that you would remember our friendship, and that you would treat me as a brother."

Madame paused for a moment. "I do not disown you for a brother," she said, "in refusing your Majesty an injustice."—"An injustice!"—"Oh, Sire, if I informed others of La Vallière's conduct,—if the queen knew—"

"Come, come, Henrietta, let your heart speak. Remember that you have loved me; remember, too, that human hearts should be as merciful as the heart of our sovereign Master. Do not be inflexible with others; forgive La Vallière!"—"I cannot; she has offended me."—"But for my sake?"—"Sire, for your sake I would do anything in the world except that."

"You will drive me to despair,—you compel me to turn to the last resource of weak people; you then incite me to wrath and discord?"—"I advise you to be reasonable."—"Reasonable! I can be so no longer."—"Nay, Sire, I pray you—"—"For pity's sake, my sister; it is the first time I have entreated any one, and I have no hope in any one but in you."

"Oh, Sire, you are weeping!"—"From rage, from humiliation!—that I, the king, should have been obliged to descend to entreaty! I shall hate this moment during my whole life. My sister, you have made me suffer in one moment more pain than I could have anticipated in the greatest extremity in life;" and the king rose and gave free vent to his tears, which in fact were tears of anger and of shame.

Madame was not touched exactly,—for the best women, when their pride is hurt, are without pity,—but she was afraid that the tears the king was shedding might possibly carry away every soft and tender feeling in his heart. "Give what commands you please, Sire," she said; "and since you prefer my humiliation to your own,—although mine is public, and yours has been witnessed but by myself alone,—speak! I will obey your Majesty."

"No, no, Henrietta!" exclaimed Louis, transported with gratitude; "you will have yielded to a brother's wishes."—

"I no longer have any brother, since I obey."—"Will you accept my kingdom in grateful acknowledgment?"—"How passionately you love, Sire, when you do love!"

He did not answer. He had seized upon Madame's hand and covered it with kisses. "And so you will receive this poor girl back again, and will forgive her; you will find how gentle and pure-hearted she is."—"I will maintain her in my household."—"No, you will give her your friendship, my dear sister."—"I have never liked her."—"Well, for my sake you will treat her kindly, will you not, Henrietta?"—"I will treat her as your mistress."

The king rose suddenly to his feet. By this word which had so fatally escaped her lips, Madame had destroyed all the merit of her sacrifice. The king felt freed from all obligation. Exasperated beyond measure, and bitterly offended, he replied, "I thank you, Madame; I shall never forget the service you have rendered me;" and saluting her with an affectation of ceremony, he took his leave of her. As he passed before a glass, he saw that his eyes were red, and he stamped with anger. But it was too late; for Malicorne and D'Artagnan, who were standing at the door, had seen his eyes. "The king has been crying," thought Malicorne.

D'Artagnan approached the king with a respectful air, and said in a low tone, "Sire, it would be better to return to your own apartments by the small staircase."—"Why?"—"Because the dust of the road has left its traces on your face," said D'Artagnan. "*Mordioux!*" he thought, "when the king has been giving way like a child, let those look to it who may bring sorrow to her for whom the king has wept."

CHAPTER CLXX

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE'S POCKET-HANDKERCHIEF

MADAME was not bad-hearted; she was only hasty and impetuous. The king was not imprudent; he was only in love. Hardly had they entered into this sort of compact, which terminated in La Vallière's recall, when both sought to make as much as they could by their bargain. The king wished to see La Vallière every moment in the day; while Madame, who was sensible of the king's annoyance ever since he had so entreated

her, would not abandon La Vallière without a contest. She planted every conceivable difficulty in the king's path. He was in fact obliged, in order to get a glimpse of La Vallière, to be exceedingly devoted in his attentions to his sister-in-law; and this, indeed, was Madame's plan of policy. As she had chosen some one to second her efforts, and as this person was Montalais, the king found himself completely hemmed in every time he paid Madame a visit; he was surrounded, and was never left a moment alone. Madame displayed in her conversation a charm of manner and brilliancy of wit which eclipsed everything. Montalais followed her example, and soon rendered herself quite insupportable to the king,—which was, in fact, the very thing she had expected. She then set Malicorne at the king, who found the means of informing his Majesty that there was a young person belonging to the court who was exceedingly miserable; and on the king's inquiring who this person was, Malicorne replied that it was Mademoiselle de Montalais. To this the king declared that it was perfectly just that a person should be unhappy when she rendered others so. Whereupon Malicorne explained how matters stood; for he had received his directions from Montalais.

The king began to open his eyes. He remarked that as soon as he made his appearance, Madame made hers too; that she remained in the corridors until after he had left; that she accompanied him to the outermost door, fearing that he might speak in the antechambers to one of her maids of honour. One evening she went further still. The king was seated, surrounded by the ladies who were present, and held in his hand, concealed by his lace ruffle, a small note which he wished to slip into La Vallière's hand. Madame guessed both his intention and the letter too. It was very difficult to prevent the king from going wherever he pleased, and yet it was necessary to prevent his going near La Vallière to greet her, as by so doing he could let the note fall into her lap behind her fan or into her pocket-handkerchief. The king, who was also on the watch, suspected that a snare was being laid for him. He rose and pushed his chair, without affectation, near Mademoiselle de Châtillon, with whom he began to talk in a light tone. They were amusing themselves in making rhymes; from Mademoiselle de Châtillon he went to Montalais, and then to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. And thus, by this skilful manœuvre, he found himself seated in front of La Vallière, whom he completely concealed. Madame pretended to be greatly occupied; she was altering

a group of flowers that she was working in tapestry. The king showed the corner of his letter to La Vallière, and the latter held out her handkerchief with a look which signified, "Put the letter inside." Then, as the king had placed his own handkerchief upon his chair, he was adroit enough to let it fall on the ground, so that La Vallière slipped her handkerchief on the chair. The king took it up quietly, without any one observing what he did, placed the letter within it, and returned the handkerchief to the chair. There was only just time for La Vallière to stretch out her hand to take the handkerchief with its valuable contents. But Madame, who had observed everything that had passed, said to Mademoiselle de Châtillon, "Châtillon, be good enough to pick up the king's handkerchief, if you please; it has fallen on the carpet."

The young girl obeyed with the utmost precipitation; and the king having moved from his seat, and La Vallière being in no little degree nervous and confused, another handkerchief was seen on the chair. "Ah! I beg your Majesty's pardon," said Mademoiselle de Châtillon; "you have two handkerchiefs, I perceive." And the king was accordingly obliged to put into his pocket La Vallière's handkerchief as well as his own. He certainly gained that souvenir of Louise; but she lost a copy of verses which had cost the king ten hours' hard labour, and which, so far as she was concerned, was perhaps as good as a long poem. It would be impossible to describe the king's anger and La Vallière's despair; but shortly afterwards a circumstance occurred which was more than remarkable.

When the king left, in order to retire to his own apartments, Malicorne—informed of what had passed, one can hardly tell how—was waiting in the antechamber. The antechambers of the Palais-Royal are naturally dark; and in the evening, as little ceremony was observed at Madame's, they were but indifferently lighted. Nothing pleased the king more than this dim light. As a general rule, Love, whose mind and heart are constantly in a blaze, dislikes light anywhere else than in the mind and heart. And so the antechamber was dark; a single page carried a torch before the king, who walked on slowly, greatly annoyed at what had recently occurred. Malicorne passed close to the king, almost stumbled against him in fact, and begged his forgiveness with the profoundest humility; but the king, who was in an exceedingly ill temper, was very sharp in his reproof to Malicorne, who disappeared as soon and as quietly as he possibly could. Louis retired to rest, having had that evening a little

misunderstanding with the queen; and the next day, as soon as he entered the cabinet, the desire seized him to kiss La Vallière's handkerchief. He called his valet. "Fetch me," he said, "the coat I wore yesterday evening, but be very sure you do not touch anything it may contain."

The order being obeyed, the king himself searched the pocket of the coat. He found only one handkerchief, and that his own; La Vallière's had disappeared. While busied with all kinds of conjectures and suspicions, a letter was brought to him from La Vallière; it ran in these terms:

"How kind and good of you, my dear Lord, to have sent me those beautiful verses! How full of ingenuity and perseverance your affection is; how is it possible to help loving you so dearly!"

"What does this mean?" thought the king; "there must be some mistake. Look well about," he said to the valet, "for a pocket-handkerchief must be in one of my pockets; and if you do not find it, or if you have touched it—" He reflected for a moment. To make a State matter of the loss of the handkerchief would be to act too absurdly, and he therefore added, "There was a letter of some importance inside the handkerchief, which had somehow got among the folds of it."—"But, Sire," replied the valet, "your Majesty had only one handkerchief, and that is it."—"True, true," replied the king, setting his teeth hard together. "Oh, poverty, how I envy you! Happy is the man who can empty his own pockets of letters and handkerchiefs!"

He read La Vallière's letter over again, endeavouring to imagine in what conceivable way his verses could have reached their destination. There was a postscript to the letter:—

"I send you back by your messenger this reply, so unworthy of what you sent me."

"Good! I shall find out something now," he said, delightedly. "Who is waiting, and who brought me this letter?"—"M. Malicorne," replied the valet, timidly.—"Let him enter."

Malicorne entered. "You come from Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said the king, with a sigh.—"Yes, Sire."—"And you took Mademoiselle de la Vallière something from me?"—"I, Sire?"—"Yes, you."—"Oh, no, Sire."—"Mademoiselle de la Vallière says so distinctly."—"Oh, Sire, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is mistaken."

The king frowned. "What jest is this?" he said; "explain yourself! Why does Mademoiselle de la Vallière call you my messenger? What did you take to that lady? Speak, Monsieur, and quickly!"—"Sire, I merely took Mademoiselle de la Vallière a pocket-handkerchief; that was all."—"A handkerchief,—what handkerchief?"

"Sire, at the very moment when I had the misfortune to stumble against your Majesty's person yesterday,—a misfortune which I shall deplore to the last day of my life, especially after the displeasure which you exhibited,—I remained, Sire, motionless with despair, your Majesty being at too great a distance to hear my excuses, when I saw something white lying on the ground."—"Ah!" said the king.—"I stooped down,—it was a pocket-handkerchief. For a moment I had an idea that when I stumbled against your Majesty I must have caused the handkerchief to fall from your pocket; but as I felt it all over very respectfully, I perceived a cipher at one of the corners, and on looking at it closely I found that it was Mademoiselle de la Vallière's cipher. I presumed that on coming thither that young lady had let her handkerchief fall, and I accordingly hastened to restore it to her as she was leaving; and that is all I gave to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I entreat your Majesty to believe." Malicorne's manner was so simple, so full of contrition, and marked with such extreme humility, that the king was greatly amused in listening to him. He was as pleased with him for what he had done as if he had rendered him the greatest service. "This is the second fortunate meeting I have had with you, Monsieur," he said; "you may count upon my friendship."

The plain and sober truth is that Malicorne had picked the king's pocket of the handkerchief as dexterously as any of the pickpockets of the good city of Paris could have done. Madame never knew of this little incident; but Montalais gave La Vallière some idea of the manner in which it had really happened, and La Vallière afterwards told the king, who laughed exceedingly at it, and pronounced Malicorne to be a first-rate politician. Louis XIV. was right, and it is well known that he was tolerably acquainted with human nature.

CHAPTER CLXXI

WHICH TREATS OF GARDENERS, OF LADDERS, AND MAIDS OF HONOUR

MIRACLES, unfortunately, could not always last for ever, while Madame's ill-humour still continued to last. In a week's time matters had reached such a point that the king could no longer look at La Vallière without a look full of suspicion crossing his own. Whenever a promenade was proposed, Madame, in order to avoid the recurrence of scenes similar to that of the thunderstorm or the royal oak, had a variety of indispositions ready prepared; and, thanks to them, she was unable to go out, and her maids of honour remained indoors. There was not the slightest chance or means of paying a nocturnal visit; for in this respect the king had on the very first occasion experienced a severe check, which happened in the following manner. As at Fontainebleau, he had taken De Saint-Aignan with him one evening, when he wished to pay La Vallière a visit; but he had found no one but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had begun to call out "Fire!" and "Thieves!" in such a manner that a perfect legion of chambermaids, attendants, and pages ran to her assistance; so that De Saint-Aignan, who had remained behind in order to save the honour of his royal master, who had fled precipitately, had incurred a severe scolding from the queen-mother as well as from Madame herself. In addition, he had the next morning received two challenges from the De Mortemart family, and the king had been obliged to interfere. This mistake had been owing to the fact that Madame had suddenly ordered a change in the apartments of her maids of honour, and directed La Vallière and Montalais to sleep in her own boudoir.

Nothing, therefore, was now possible, not even any communication by letter; to write under the eyes of so ferocious an Argus as Madame, whose kindness of disposition was so uncertain, was to run the risk of exposure to the greatest dangers; and it can well be conceived into what a state of continuous irritation and of ever-increasing anger all these petty annoyances threw the young king. He almost tormented himself to death in endeavouring to discover a means of communication; and as he did not unbosom himself to either Malicorne or

D'Artagnan, the means were not discovered. Malicorne had, indeed, some occasional brilliant flashes of imagination with which he tried to inspire the king with confidence; but whether from shame or suspicion, the king, who had at first begun to nibble at the bait, soon abandoned the hook. In this way, for instance, one evening, while the king was crossing the garden and looking sadly up at Madame's windows, Malicorne stumbled over a ladder lying beside a border of box, and said to Manicamp, who was walking with him behind the king, and who had not either stumbled over or seen anything, "Did you not see that I just now stumbled against a ladder, and was nearly thrown down?"

"No," said Manicamp, absent-minded as usual; "but it appears that you did not fall."—"That doesn't matter; but it is not, on that account, the less dangerous to leave ladders lying about in that manner."—"True, one might hurt himself, especially when absent-minded."—"It is not that; I mean to say that it is dangerous to allow ladders to lie about like that under the windows of the maids of honour."

Louis started imperceptibly. "Why so?" inquired Manicamp.—"Speak louder!" whispered Malicorne, as he touched him with his arm.—"Why so?" said Manicamp, louder. The king listened. "Because, for instance," said Malicorne, "a ladder nineteen feet high is just the height of the cornice of those windows."

Manicamp, instead of answering, was dreaming of something else. "Ask me, can't you, what windows I mean," whispered Malicorne.—"But to what windows are you referring?" asked Manicamp, aloud.—"The windows of Madame's apartments."—"Eh!"—"Oh! I don't say that any one would ever venture to climb up into Madame's room; but in Madame's boudoir, separated by a partition, sleep two exceedingly pretty girls, Mesdemoiselles de la Vallière and de Montalais."

"By a mere partition?" said Manicamp.—"Look! you see how brilliantly lighted Madame's apartments are? Well, do you see those two windows?"—"Yes."—"And that window close to the others, but less brightly lighted?"—"Certainly."—"Well, that is the room of the maids of honour. Look! the weather is warm; there is Mademoiselle de la Vallière now, opening the window. Ah, how many soft things could an enterprising lover say to her, if he only suspected that there was lying here a ladder nineteen feet long, which would just reach the cornice!"

"But she is not alone; you said that Mademoiselle de Montalais is with her."—"Mademoiselle de Montalais counts for nothing; she is her oldest friend, and exceedingly devoted to her,—a positive well, into which can be thrown all sorts of secrets of which one might wish to get rid."

The king had not lost a single syllable of this conversation. Malicorne had even remarked that his Majesty had slackened his pace, in order to give him time to finish. So, when he arrived at the door, he dismissed every one, with the exception of Malicorne,—a circumstance which excited no surprise, for it was known that the king was in love, and they suspected he was going to compose some verses by moonlight; and although there was no moon that evening, the king might nevertheless have some verses to compose. Every one took his leave; and then the king turned towards Malicorne, who respectfully waited until his Majesty should address him.

"What were you saying just now about a ladder, M. Malicorne?" he asked.—"Did I say anything about ladders, Sire?" said Malicorne, gazing into space as if in search of his words which had flown away.—"Yes, of a ladder nineteen feet long."—"Oh, yes, Sire, I remember; but I spoke to M. de Manicamp, and I should not have said a word had I known your Majesty could have heard us."

"And why would you not have said a word?"—"Because I should not have liked to get the gardener scolded who had left it there,—poor fellow!"—"Don't make yourself uneasy on that account! What is this ladder like?"—"If your Majesty wishes to see it, nothing is easier, for there it is."—"In that box-hedge?"—"Exactly."—"Show it to me."

Malicorne turned back and led the king up to the ladder, saying, "Here it is, Sire."—"Pull it this way a little."

When Malicorne had brought the ladder on to the walk, the king began to step its whole length. "Hum!" he said; "you say it is nineteen feet long?"—"Yes, Sire."—"Nineteen feet—that is rather long; I hardly believe it can be so long as that."—"You cannot judge very correctly with the ladder in that position, Sire. If it were upright, against a tree or a wall for instance, you would be better able to judge, because the comparison would assist you a good deal."—"Oh, it does not matter, M. Malicorne; but I can hardly believe that the ladder is nineteen feet high."

"I know how accurate your Majesty's eye is, and yet I would wager." The king shook his head. "There is one infallible

means of verifying it," said Malicorne. "What is that?"—"Every one knows, Sire, that the lower story of the palace is eighteen feet high."—"True, that is very well known."—"Well, Sire, if I place the ladder against the wall, we shall be able to ascertain."—"True."

Malicorne took up the ladder like a feather, and placed it upright against the wall. And in order to try the experiment, he chose—or chance, perhaps, directed him to choose—the very window of the boudoir where La Vallière was. The ladder just reached the edge of the cornice, that is to say, almost to the sill of the window; so that by standing upon the last round but one of the ladder a man of about the middle height, as the king was, for instance, could easily hold communication with those who might be in the room. As soon as the ladder had been properly placed, the king, dropping the assumed part he had been playing in the comedy, began to ascend the rounds of the ladder, which Malicorne held at the bottom. But hardly had he completed half of his aerial journey, when a patrol of Swiss Guards appeared in the garden, and advanced straight towards the ladder. The king descended with the utmost precipitation, and concealed himself among the trees.

Malicorne perceived that he must offer himself as a sacrifice; for if he too were to conceal himself, the Guard would search everywhere until they had found either himself or the king, perhaps both. It would be far better, therefore, that he alone should be discovered. Consequently Malicorne hid himself so clumsily that he was the only one arrested. As soon as he was arrested, Malicorne was taken to the guard-house; when there, he declared who he was, and was immediately recognised. In the meantime, by concealing himself first behind one clump of trees and then behind another, the king reached the side-door of his apartments, very much humiliated and still more disappointed. More than that, the noise made in arresting Malicorne had drawn La Vallière and Montalais to their window; and even Madame herself had appeared at her own, with a pair of wax candles, asking what was the matter.

Meanwhile Malicorne sent for D'Artagnan, who did not lose a moment in hurrying to him. But it was in vain that he attempted to make him understand his reasons, and in vain also that D'Artagnan did understand them; and, further, it was equally in vain that both their sharp and inventive minds endeavoured to give another turn to the adventure. There was no other resource left for Malicorne but to let it be supposed

that he had wished to enter Mademoiselle de Montalais's apartment, as M. de Saint-Aignan had passed for having wished to force Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's door. Madame was inflexible; in the first place, because if M. Malicorne had in fact wished to enter her apartment at night through the window and by the means of the ladder, in order to see Montalais, it was a punishable offence on Malicorne's part, and he must be punished accordingly; and in the second place, if Malicorne, instead of acting in his own name, had acted as an intermediary between La Vallière and a person whom she did not wish to mention, his crime was even greater, since love, which is an excuse for everything, did not exist in that case as an excuse for him. Madame therefore made the greatest possible disturbance about the matter, and obtained his dismissal from Monsieur's household, without reflecting, poor blind creature! that both Malicorne and Montalais held her fast in their clutches in consequence of her visit to M. de Guiche, and in a variety of other ways equally delicate. Montalais, who was perfectly furious, wished to revenge herself immediately; but Malicorne pointed out to her that the king's countenance was worth all the disgraces in the world, and that it was a great thing to have to suffer on his Majesty's account.

Malicorne was perfectly right, and therefore, although Montalais was a woman, nay, even had the spirit of ten women in her, he succeeded in bringing her round to his own opinion. And we must not omit to state that the king helped them to console themselves; for in the first place he presented Malicorne with fifty thousand livres as a compensation for the post he had lost, and in the next place he gave him an appointment in his own household, delighted to have an opportunity of revenging himself in such a manner upon Madame for all she had made him and La Vallière suffer. But as he no longer had Malicorne to steal his pocket-handkerchiefs and to measure ladders for him, the poor lover was destitute. There seemed to be no hope of ever getting near La Vallière again, so long as she should remain at the Palais-Royal. All the dignities and all the money in the world could not remedy that. Fortunately, however, Malicorne was on the look-out, and he succeeded in meeting Montalais, who on her part, it must be admitted, did her best to meet Malicorne.

"What do you do during the night in Madame's apartment?" Malicorne asked the young girl.—"Why, at night I go to sleep," she replied.

"But it is very wrong to sleep; it is unseemly for a girl who is suffering as you are to sleep."—"And from what am I suffering, may I ask?"—"Are you not in despair at my absence?"—"Of course not, since you have received fifty thousand livres and an appointment in the king's household."

"Never mind! You are exceedingly afflicted at not seeing me as you used to see me formerly, and more than all, you are in despair at my having lost Madame's confidence; come now, is not that true?"—"Perfectly true."—"Very good; your distress of mind prevents you from sleeping at night, and so you sob and sigh, and blow your nose ten times every minute as loud as possible."—"But, my dear Malicorne, Madame cannot endure the slightest noise near her."

"I know that perfectly well,—of course she can't endure anything; and so, I tell you, she will not lose a minute, when she sees your deep distress, in turning you out of her room."—"I understand."—"It is very fortunate that you do."—"Well, and what will happen next?"—"The next thing that will happen will be that La Vallière, finding herself alone without you, will break the stillness of the night with such groans and such loud lamentations that she will exhibit despair enough for two."

"In that case she will be put into another room."—"Yes; but which?"—"Which? You seem to be puzzled, Mr. Inventor-General."—"Not at all; wherever and whatever the room may be, it will always be preferable to Madame's own room."

"That is true."—"Well, begin your lamentations a little to-night."—"I certainly will not fail to do so."—"And give La Vallière a hint also."—"Oh, never fear! She cries quite enough already to herself."—"Very well, all she has to do is to cry out loudly." And they separated.

CHAPTER CLXXII

WHICH TREATS OF CARPENTRY OPERATIONS, AND FURNISHES DETAILS UPON THE MODE OF CONSTRUCTING STAIRCASES

THE advice which had been given to Montalais was communicated by her to La Vallière, who saw that it was wanting in wisdom, but who after a certain amount of resistance, arising rather from timidity than from indifference to the project, resolved to put it into execution. This story of the two girls weeping, and filling Madame's bedroom with sounds of lamentation, was Malicorne's *chef-d'œuvre*. As nothing is so probable as improbability, so natural as romance, this Arabian Nights tale succeeded perfectly with Madame. First she sent away Montalais; and then three days, or rather three nights, afterwards, she had La Vallière removed. To the latter she gave one of the small rooms on the top story, situated immediately over the apartments allotted to the gentlemen. One story only —that is to say, a mere flooring—separated the maids of honour from the officers and gentlemen of her husband's household. A private staircase, which was placed under Madame de Navailles's surveillance, was the only means of communication. For greater safety, Madame de Navailles, who had heard of his Majesty's previous attempts, had the windows of the rooms and the openings of the chimneys carefully barred. There was, therefore, every possible security provided for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whose room bore more resemblance to a cage than to anything else. When Mademoiselle de la Vallière was in her own room,—and she was there very frequently, for Madame scarcely ever had any occasion for her services when once she knew she was safe under Madame de Navailles's inspection,—Mademoiselle de la Vallière had no other means of amusing herself than that of looking through the bars of her window.

It happened, therefore, that one morning, as she was looking out as usual, she perceived Malicorne at one of the windows exactly opposite to her own. He held a carpenter's rule in his hand, was surveying the buildings, and seemed to be calculating some algebraic formulas on paper. He somewhat resembled those engineers who, hidden in a trench, get the elevation of the angles of a bastion or take the height of the walls of a fortress. La Vallière recognised Malicorne, and bowed to him;

Malicorne, in his turn, replied by a profound bow, and disappeared from the window. She was surprised at this marked coolness, so inconsistent with his unfailing good humour; but she remembered that the poor fellow had lost his appointment on her account, and that he could hardly be very amiably disposed towards her, since in all probability she would never be in a position to make him any recompense for what he had lost. She knew how to forgive offences, and with still greater reason could she sympathise with misfortune. La Vallière would have asked Montalais her opinion if she had been there; but she was absent, it being the hour she usually devoted to her own correspondence. Suddenly La Vallière observed an object, thrown from the window at which Malicorne had appeared, pass across the open space, enter her room through the iron bars, and roll upon the floor. She advanced with no little curiosity towards this object, and picked it up; it was one of those spools upon which silk is wound, only in this instance instead of silk a small piece of paper was wrapped round it. La Vallière unrolled it and read the following:—

"MADEMOISELLE,—I am exceedingly anxious to learn two things: the first is whether the flooring of your apartment is of wood or brick; the second, at what distance from the window your bed is placed. Forgive my importunity, and will you be good enough to send me an answer by the same way by which you receive this letter,—that is to say, by means of the spool; only, instead of throwing it into my room, as I have thrown it into yours, which will be too difficult for you to attempt, have the goodness merely to let it fall.

"Believe me, Mademoiselle, your most humble and most respectful servant, MALICORNE.

"Write the reply, if you please, upon the letter itself."

"Ah, poor fellow!" exclaimed La Vallière, "he must have gone out of his mind;" and she directed towards her correspondent, of whom she caught but a faint glimpse in the darkness of his room, a look full of kind compassion. Malicorne understood her, and shook his head as if to reply to her, "No, no, I am not out of my mind; be quite satisfied." La Vallière smiled as if still in doubt. "No, no," Malicorne signified by a gesture, "my head is all right;" and he pointed to his head. Then, after moving his hand like a man who writes very rapidly, he put his hands together as if entreating her to write.

La Vallière, even if he were mad, saw no impropriety in doing

what Malicorne requested her. She took a pencil and wrote, "Wood;" and then counted ten paces from her window to her bed, and wrote, "ten paces;" and having done this she looked out again at Malicorne, who bowed to her, signifying that he was about to descend. La Vallière understood that it was to pick up the spool. She approached the window, and in accordance with Malicorne's instructions, let it fall. The winder was still rolling along the flag-stones as Malicorne started after it, overtook and picked it up, began to peel it as a monkey would a nut, and ran straight towards the abode of M. de Saint-Aignan.

De Saint-Aignan had taken care that his rooms should be as near the king as possible, as certain plants seek the sun's rays in order to develop themselves more luxuriantly. His apartment consisted of two rooms in that portion of the palace occupied by Louis XIV. himself. M. de Saint-Aignan was very proud of this proximity, which afforded easy access to his Majesty, and more than that, the favour of occasional unexpected meetings. At the moment to which we are now referring he was engaged in having both his rooms magnificently carpeted, with the expectation of receiving the honour of frequent visits from the king; for his Majesty, since his passion for La Vallière, had chosen De Saint-Aignan as his confidant, and could not do without him either night or day. Malicorne introduced himself to the count, and met with no difficulties, because he had been favourably noticed by the king, and the credit which one man may happen to enjoy is always a bait for others.

De Saint-Aignan asked his visitor if he were the fortunate possessor of any news. "Yes, great news," replied the latter. —"Ah!" said De Saint-Aignan, inquisitive like all favourites; "what is it?"—"Mademoiselle de la Vallière has changed her quarters."

"What do you mean?" said De Saint-Aignan, opening his eyes very wide. "She was living in the same apartments with Madame."—"Precisely so; but Madame got tired of her proximity, and has installed her in a room which is situated exactly above your future apartment."—"What! up there!" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan, with surprise, and pointing at the floor above him with his finger. "No," said Malicorne, "yonder,"—indicating the building opposite.

"What do you mean, then, by saying that her room is above my apartment?"—"Because I am sure that your apartment ought most naturally to be under La Vallière's room." De

Saint-Aignan, at this remark, gave poor Malicorne a look similar to one of those La Vallière had already given him a quarter of an hour before; that is to say, he thought Malicorne had lost his senses.

"Monsieur," said Malicorne to him, "I ask leave to answer your thoughts."—"What! my thoughts?"—"Certainly; you have not clearly understood, it seems to me, what I meant to convey."—"I admit that."

"Well, then, you are aware that underneath the apartments set apart for Madame's maids of honour the gentlemen in attendance on the king and on Monsieur are lodged."—"Yes, I know that, since Manicamp, De Wardes, and others are living there."—"Precisely. Well, Monsieur, observe the singularity of the circumstance; the two rooms destined for M. de Guiche are exactly the very two rooms situated underneath those which Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de la Vallière occupy."—"Well; what then?"—"What then, do you say? Why, these two rooms are empty, since M. de Guiche is now lying wounded at Fontainebleau."

"I assure you, my dear Monsieur, I cannot guess your meaning."—"Well! if I had the happiness to call myself De Saint-Aignan, I should guess immediately."—"And what would you do, then?"—"I should at once change the rooms I am occupying here, for those which M. de Guiche is not using yonder."

"Can you suppose such a thing?" said De Saint-Aignan, disdainfully. "What! abandon the chief post of honour, the proximity to the king,—a privilege conceded only to princes of the blood, to dukes and peers! Permit me to tell you, my dear M. de Malicorne, that you must be out of your senses."—"Monsieur," replied the young man, seriously, "you commit two mistakes. My name is Malicorne, simply; and I am in perfect possession of all my senses." Then, drawing a paper from his pocket, he said, "Listen to what I am going to say; and afterwards, I will show you this paper."—"I am listening," said De Saint-Aignan.

"You know that Madame watches over La Vallière as carefully as Argus watched over the nymph Io."—"I do."—"You know that the king has sought for an opportunity, but in vain, of speaking to the fair prisoner, and that neither you nor myself have yet succeeded in procuring him this piece of good fortune."—"You certainly ought to know something on that subject, my poor Malicorne."

"Very good! what do you suppose would happen to the man

whose imagination devised some means of bringing the two lovers together?"—"Oh, the king would have no bounds to his gratitude!"—"M. de Saint-Aignan, would you not be desirous to taste a little of this royal gratitude?"—"Certainly," replied De Saint-Aignan, "any favour from my master, when I may have done my duty, can only be most precious to me."

"In that case look at this paper, Monsieur the Count."—"What is it,—a plan?"—"Yes! a plan of M. de Guiche's two rooms, which in all probability will soon be your two rooms."—"Oh, no, whatever may happen!"—"Why so?"—"Because my own rooms are the envy of too many gentlemen, to whom I certainly shall not give them up,—M. de Roquelaure, for instance, M. de la Ferté, and M. Dangeau."—"In that case I shall leave you, Monsieur the Count, and I shall go and offer to one of those gentlemen the plan I have just shown you, together with the advantages annexed to it."

"But why do you not keep them for yourself?" inquired De Saint-Aignan, suspiciously.—"Because the king would never do me the honour of paying me a visit openly, while he would readily go and see any one of those gentlemen."—"What! the king would go and see any one of those gentlemen?"—"Go! most certainly would he, ten times instead of once. Is it possible you can ask me if the king would go to an apartment which would bring him nearer to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"—"Admirably near her, with a whole floor between them!"

Malicorne unfolded the piece of paper, which had been wrapped round the bobbin. "Monsieur the Count," he said, "pray observe that the flooring of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room is merely a wooden flooring."—"Well?"—"Well! you will get hold of a journeyman carpenter, lock him up in your apartment without letting him know where you have taken him, and let him make a hole in your ceiling, and consequently in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's floor."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan, as if dazzled.—"What is the matter?" said Malicorne.—"I say that you have hit upon a singularly bold idea, Monsieur."—"It will seem a very trifling one to the king, I assure you."—"Lovers never think of the risk they run."

"What danger do you apprehend, Monsieur the Count?"—"Why, effecting such an opening as that will make a terrible noise; it will be heard throughout the entire palace."—"Oh, Monsieur the Count, I am quite sure that the carpenter I shall

select will not make the slightest noise. He will saw an opening six feet square, with a saw muffled with tow; and no one, not even those in the immediate vicinity, will know that he is at work."

"My dear M. Malicorne, you astound, you positively bewilder me."—"To continue," replied Malicorne, quietly, "in the room the ceiling of which you have cut through you will put up a staircase, which will either allow Mademoiselle de la Vallière to descend into your room, or the king to ascend into Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room."—"But the staircase will be seen."—"No; for in your room it will be hidden by a partition, over which you will throw a tapestry similar to that which adorns the rest of the apartment. And in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room it will not be seen; for the trap-door, which will be a part of the flooring itself, will be made to open under the bed."—"Of course," said De Saint-Aignan, whose eyes began to sparkle with delight.

"And now, Monsieur the Count, there is no occasion to make you admit that the king will frequently come to the room where such a staircase may be constructed. I think that M. Dangeau particularly will be struck by my idea, and I shall now go and explain it to him."—"But, my dear M. Malicorne," cried De Saint-Aignan, "you forget that you spoke to me about it first, and that I have, consequently, the right of priority."—"Do you wish for the preference, then?"—"Do I wish it? I should think so!"

"The fact is, M. de Saint-Aignan, I am presenting you with that which is as good as the promise of an additional step in the peerage, and perhaps even a good estate to accompany your dukedom."—"At least," replied De Saint-Aignan, reddening with pleasure, "it will give me an opportunity of showing the king that he is not mistaken in occasionally calling me his friend,—an opportunity, dear M. Malicorne, for which I shall be indebted to you."

"And which you will not forget to remember?" inquired Malicorne, smiling.—"Nothing will delight me more, Monsieur."—"But I am not the king's friend, Monsieur; I am simply his attendant."—"Yes! and if you imagine that that staircase is as good as a dukedom for myself, I think there will certainly be letters of nobility for you." Malicorne bowed.

"All I have to do now," said De Saint-Aignan, "is to move as soon as possible."—"I do not think that the king will object to it; ask his permission, however."—"I will go and see him

this very moment."—" And I will run and get the carpenter of whom I was speaking."

" When shall I have him? "—" This very evening."—" Do not forget your precautions."—" He shall be brought with his eyes bandaged."—" And I will send you one of my carriages." —" Without arms."—" With one of my servants without livery, —it is agreed? "—" Very well, Monsieur the Count."

" But stay! What will La Vallière say if she sees what is going on? "—" Oh! I can assure you that she will be very much interested in the operation; and I am equally sure that if the king has not courage enough to ascend to her room, she will have sufficient curiosity to come down."

" We will live in hope," said De Saint-Aignan; " and now I am off to his Majesty. At what time this evening will my carpenter begin? "—" At eight o'clock."—" How long do you suppose he will take to make this opening? "—" About two hours; only afterwards he must have sufficient time to effect what may be called the junction between the two rooms. One night and a portion of the following day will do; we must not reckon upon less than two days, including putting up the starcase."

" Two days! That is very long."—" Nay! when one undertakes to open a door into paradise itself, we must at least take care that it is properly done."—" Quite right; so farewell for a short time, dear M. Malicorne. I shall begin to remove the day after to-morrow, in the evening."

CHAPTER CLXXIII

THE RIDE BY TORCHLIGHT

De Saint-Aignan, delighted with what he had just heard, and elated by his expectations, bent his steps towards De Guiche's two rooms. He who a quarter of an hour previous would not have yielded up his own rooms for a million livres, was now ready to pay a million, if it were necessary, for the two rooms he now coveted. But he did not meet with so many obstacles. M. de Guiche did not yet know where he was to lodge, and, besides, was still suffering too much to trouble himself about his lodgings; and so De Saint-Aignan obtained De Guiche's two rooms without difficulty. M. Dangeau, on the other hand,

obtained De Saint-Aignan's two rooms, paying to the count's steward a bonus of six thousand livres, and thought he had the best of the bargain. Dangeau's two rooms were to be De Guiche's future abode. This was all; we do not affirm very positively that, in the general moving about, those were the two rooms which De Guiche did occupy. As for M. Dangeau, he was so immeasurably delighted that he did not even give himself the trouble to think whether De Saint-Aignan had any particular reason for removing.

Within an hour after De Saint-Aignan's new resolution, he was in possession of the two rooms; and ten minutes later Malicorne entered, followed by the upholsterers. During this time the king asked for De Saint-Aignan; the valet ran to his late apartments and found Dangeau there; Dangeau sent him on to De Guiche's, and De Saint-Aignan was at last found; but a little delay had of course taken place, and the king had already exhibited once or twice evident signs of impatience, when De Saint-Aignan entered his royal master's presence, quite out of breath. "You, too, abandon me, then," said Louis XIV., in a tone of lamentation similar to that with which Cæsar eighteen hundred years previous had spoken the *Tu quoque*. "Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, "I am not abandoning your Majesty, quite the contrary; only, I am busily occupied in changing my lodgings."

"What do you mean? I thought that you had finished moving three days ago."—"Yes, Sire; but I don't find myself comfortable where I am, and so I am going to change to the opposite side of the building."—"Was I not right when I said that you were abandoning me?" exclaimed the king. "Oh, this exceeds all endurance! But so it is. There was only one woman for whom my heart cared at all, and all my family is leagued together to tear her from me. I had a friend to whom I confided my distress, and who helped me to bear up under it, and now he has become wearied of my complaints, and is going to leave me without even asking my permission." De Saint-Aignan began to laugh.

The king at once guessed that there must be some mystery in this want of respect. "What is it?" cried he, full of hope.—"This, Sire,—that the friend whom the king calumniates is going to try to restore to his sovereign the happiness he has lost."

"Are you going to enable me to see La Vallière?" said Louis XIV.—"I cannot say positively, Sire; but I hope so."—"How?

—how? Tell me that, De Saint-Aignan! I wish to know what your project is, and to help you with all my power."

"Sire," replied De Saint-Aignan, "I cannot, even myself, tell very well how I must set about attaining success; but I have every reason to believe that from to-morrow—"—"To-morrow, do you say? What happiness! But why are you changing your rooms?"—"In order to serve your Majesty to greater advantage."

"And how can your moving serve me?"—"Do you happen to know where the two rooms destined for the Comte de Guiche are situated?"—"Yes."—"Well, your Majesty now knows where I am going."—"Very likely; but that does not help me."—"What! is it possible that you do not understand, Sire, that above these lodgings are two rooms, one of which is Mademoiselle de Montalais's, and the other—"

"La Vallière's, is it not so, De Saint-Aignan? Oh, yes, yes! It is a brilliant idea. De Saint-Aignan, a true friend's idea, a poet's idea,—in bringing me nearer her when the whole world separates me from her. You are far more to me than Pylades was to Orestes, or Patroclus to Achilles."—"Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, with a smile, "I question whether, if your Majesty were to know my projects to their full extent, you would continue to confer such pompous qualifications upon me. Ah, Sire, I know how very different are the epithets which certain Puritans of the court will not fail to apply to me when they learn what I intend to do for your Majesty."

"De Saint-Aignan, I am dying from impatience; I am in a perfect fever; I shall never be able to wait until to-morrow. To-morrow! why, to-morrow is an eternity!"—"And yet, Sire, I shall require you, if you please, to go out presently and divert your impatience by a little excursion."—"With you,—agreed! We will talk about your projects; we will talk of her."—"Nay, Sire; I remain here."

"With whom shall I go out, then?"—"With the ladies."—"Nothing shall induce me to do that, De Saint-Aignan."—"Sire, you *must* do it."—"No, no,—a thousand times, no! I will never again expose myself to the horrible torture of being close to her, of seeing her, of touching her dress as I pass by her, and yet of not being able to say a word to her. No, I renounce an ordeal which you suppose to be happiness, but which is a torture that consumes and eats away my very life,—to see her in the presence of strangers, and not to tell her that I love her, when my whole being reveals my affection and betrays me to every one! No,

I have sworn never to do it again, and I will keep my oath."

"Yet, Sire, pray listen to me for a moment."—"I will listen to nothing, De Saint-Aignan."—"In that case I will continue. It is most urgent, Sire,—pray understand me, it is of the greatest importance,—that Madame and her maids of honour should be absent for two hours from the palace."

"I cannot understand your meaning at all, De Saint-Aignan."—"It is hard for me to give directions to my king, but in this circumstance I do give you directions, Sire; and a hunt or a drive is essential to my purposes."—"But this hunt, this drive, would be a caprice, a mere whim. In displaying such an impatient humour I show my whole court that I have no control over my own feelings. Do not people already say that I dream of conquering the world, but that I ought to begin by conquering myself?"

"Those who say so, Sire, are insolent and factious persons; but whoever they may be, if your Majesty prefers to listen to them, I have nothing further to say. In that case what we have appointed for to-morrow must be postponed indefinitely."—"Nay, De Saint-Aignan, I will go out this evening,—I will go by torchlight to sleep at St. Germain; I will breakfast there to-morrow, and will return to Paris by three o'clock. Will that do?"—"Admirably."

"Then I will set out this evening at eight o'clock."—"Your Majesty has hit the exact minute."—"And you positively will tell me nothing more?"—"It is because I have nothing more to tell you. Industry goes for something in this world, Sire; but yet Chance plays so important a part in it that I have been accustomed to leave her the narrowest part, confident that she will manage so as always to take the widest."—"Well, I abandon myself entirely to you."—"And you are quite right."

Comforted in this manner, the king went immediately to Madame, to whom he announced the intended expedition. Madame fancied from the very first moment that she saw in this unexpectedly arranged party a plot of the king to gain an interview with La Vallière, either on the road, under cover of the darkness, or in some other way; but she took especial care to reveal none of her thoughts to her brother-in-law, and accepted the invitation with a smile upon her lips. She gave directions aloud that her maids of honour should accompany her, secretly intending in the evening to take the most effectual steps to interfere with his Majesty's attachment. Then, when she was

alone, and at the very moment when the poor lover, who had issued his orders for the departure, was revelling in the idea that Mademoiselle de la Vallière would form one of the party,—at the very moment, perhaps, when he was luxuriating in the sad happiness which persecuted lovers enjoy of realising by the sense of sight alone all the delights of an interdicted possession,—at that very moment, we say, Madame, who was surrounded by her maids of honour, said, "Two ladies will be enough for me this evening,—Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais."

La Vallière had anticipated the blow, and thus was prepared for it; but persecution had rendered her courageous, and she did not give Madame the pleasure of seeing on her face the impression of the shock her heart had received. On the contrary, smiling with that ineffable gentleness which gave an angelic expression to her features, "In that case, Madame, I shall be at liberty this evening, I suppose," she said.—"Of course."—"I shall profit by that to progress with that piece of tapestry which your Highness has been good enough to notice, and which I have already had the honour of offering to you." And having made a respectful obeisance, she withdrew to her own room; Mesdemoiselles de Tonnay-Charente and de Montalais did the same.

The report of the intended expedition went with them from Madame's chamber, and was soon spread all over the palace. Ten minutes afterwards Malicorne learned Madame's resolution, and slipped under Montalais's door a note in the following terms:—

"L. V. must pass the night with Madame."

Montalais, in pursuance of the compact she had entered into, began by burning the paper, and then sat down to reflect. Montalais was a girl full of expedients, and so had very soon arranged her plan. Towards five o'clock, which was the hour for her to repair to Madame's apartment, she was running across the courtyard, and on arriving within a dozen paces of a group of officers, she uttered a cry, fell gracefully on one knee, rose again, and walked on limping. The gentlemen ran forward to her assistance. Montalais had sprained her foot. Faithful to the discharge of her duty, she insisted, however, upon going up to Madame's apartment. "What is the matter, and why do you limp so?" the latter inquired; "I mistook you for La Vallière."

Montalais related how it had happened,—that in hurrying on,

in order to arrive as quickly as possible, she had sprained her foot. Madame seemed to pity her, and wished to have a surgeon sent for immediately; but she, assuring her that there was nothing really serious in the accident, said, "My only regret, Madame, is that it will preclude my attendance on you; and I should have begged Mademoiselle de la Vallière to take my place with your royal Highness—" Seeing that Madame frowned, she added, "But I have not done so."—"And why did you not do so?" inquired Madame.—"Because poor La Vallière seemed so happy to have her liberty for a whole evening and night too, that I did not feel courageous enough to ask her to take my place."

"What! is she so delighted as that?" inquired Madame, struck by these words.—"She is wild with delight; she, who is always so melancholy, was singing like a bird. Besides, your Highness knows that she detests going out, and also that her character has a spice of wildness in it."—"Oh!" thought Madame, "this extreme delight hardly seems natural to me."

"She has already made all her preparations," continued Montalais, "for dining in her own room *tête-à-tête* with one of her favourite books. And then, as your Highness has six other young ladies who would be delighted to accompany you, I did not make my proposal to Mademoiselle de la Vallière." Madame did not say a word in reply. "Have I acted properly?" continued Montalais, with a slight fluttering of the heart, seeing the ill-success that attended the *ruse de guerre* which she had relied upon with so much confidence that she had not thought it even necessary to try to find another. "Does Madame approve of what I have done?" she continued.

Madame was reflecting that the king could very easily leave St. Germain during the night, and that as it was only four leagues and a half from Paris to St. Germain, he might very easily be in Paris in an hour's time. "Tell me," she said, "whether La Vallière, when she heard of your accident, offered at least to bear you company."—"Oh! she does not yet know of my accident; but even did she know of it, I should most certainly not ask her to do anything which might interfere with her own plans. I think she wishes this evening to realise quietly by herself that amusement of the late king, when he said to M. de Cinq-Mars, 'Let us amuse ourselves by doing nothing and making ourselves miserable.'"

Madame felt convinced that some mysterious love-adventure was hidden beneath this strong desire for solitude. This mystery

might possibly be Louis's return during the night; it could not be doubted any longer,—La Vallière had been informed of his intended return, and that was the reason of her delight at having to remain behind at the Palais-Royal. It was all a plan, and arranged beforehand. "I will not be their dupe, though," said Madame; and she took a decisive step. "Mademoiselle de Montalais," she said, "will you have the goodness to inform your friend, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, that I am exceedingly sorry to disarrange her projects of solitude, but that instead of making herself miserable alone in her own room, as she wished, she will be good enough to accompany us to St. Germain and make herself miserable there."

"Ah! poor La Vallière!" said Montalais, compassionately, but with her heart throbbing with delight. "Oh, Madame, could there not be some means—"—"Enough!" said Madame, "I desire it! I prefer Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc's society to that of any one else. Go and send her to me, and take care of your foot."

Montalais did not wait for the order to be repeated; she returned to her room, wrote an answer to Malicorne, and slipped it under the carpet. The answer simply said: "She will go." A Spartan could not have written more laconically.

"By this arrangement," thought Madame, "I can watch her narrowly on the road; she will sleep near me during the night, and his Majesty must be very clever if he can exchange a single word with Mademoiselle de la Vallière." La Vallière received the order to set off with the same gentle indifference with which she had received the order to remain. But inwardly her delight was extreme, and she looked upon this change in the princess's resolution as a consolation which Providence had sent her. With less penetration than Madame possessed, she attributed all to chance.

While all, with the exception of those in disgrace, of those who were ill, and of those who were suffering from sprains, were proceeding towards St. Germain, Malicorne brought his workman to the palace in one of M. de Saint-Aignan's carriages, and led him into the room under La Vallière's. The man set to work, allured by the splendid reward which had been promised him. As the very best tools and implements had been selected from the stock belonging to the engineers attached to the king's household,—and among others a saw with such invincible teeth that it could, under water even, cut through oaken joists as hard as iron,—the work advanced rapidly; and a square portion

of the ceiling, taken from between two of the joists, fell into the arms of De Saint-Aignan, Malicorne, the workman, and a confidential valet,—the latter being a person brought into the world to see and hear everything, but to repeat nothing.

In accordance with a new plan indicated by Malicorne, the opening was effected in an angle of the room, and for this reason,—as there was no dressing-closet adjoining La Vallière's room, she had solicited, and had that very morning obtained, a large screen intended to serve as a partition. The screen which had been conceded was quite sufficient to conceal the opening, which would besides be hidden by all the artifices which cabinet-makers have at their command. The opening having been made, the workman slipped himself between the joists, and found himself in La Vallière's room. When there, he cut a square opening in the floor, and out of the boards he manufactured a trap fitting so accurately into the opening that the most practised eye could hardly detect the unavoidable interstices where it joined the floor. Malicorne had provided for everything: a ring and a couple of hinges, which had been bought for the purpose, were affixed to the trap-door; and a small circular staircase had been bought ready-made by the industrious Malicorne, who had paid two thousand livres for it. It was higher than was required; but the carpenter reduced the number of steps and it was found to fit exactly. This staircase, destined to receive so illustrious a weight, was merely fastened to the wall by a couple of iron clamps; and its base was fixed into the floor of the count's room by two iron pegs screwed down so tightly that the king and his whole council might have passed up and down the staircase without any fear. Every blow of the hammer fell upon a thick pad or cushion, and the saw was not used until the handle had been wrapped in wool, and the blade steeped in oil. The noisiest part of the work, moreover, had taken place during the night and early in the morning,—that is to say, when La Vallière and Madame were both absent.

When, about two o'clock in the afternoon, the court returned to the Palais-Royal, La Vallière went up into her room. Everything was in its place; and not the smallest particle of sawdust, not the smallest chip, was left to bear witness to the violation of her domicile. De Saint-Aignan, however, who had wished to aid all he possibly could in the work, had torn his fingers and his shirt too, and had expended no ordinary quantity of perspiration in his king's service. The palms of his hands,

especially, were covered with blisters, occasioned by his having held the ladder for Malicorne. He had moreover brought, one by one, the five pieces of the staircase, each consisting of two steps. In fact, we can safely assert that if the king had seen him so ardently at work, his Majesty would have sworn eternal gratitude towards him. As Malicorne, that man of accurate judgment, had anticipated, the workman had completely finished the job in twenty-four hours; he received twenty-four louis, and left overwhelmed with delight, for that was as much as he would ordinarily have earned in six months. No one had the slightest suspicion of what had taken place in the room under Mademoiselle de la Vallière's apartment. But in the evening of the second day, at the very moment La Vallière had just left Madame's circle and had returned to her own room, she heard a slight creaking sound at the end of the chamber. Astonished, she looked to see whence it proceeded; and the noise began again. "Who is there?" she said, in a tone of alarm.—"I," replied the well-known voice of the king.

"You! you!" cried the young girl, who for a moment fancied herself under the influence of a dream. "But where? You, Sire?"—"Here," replied the king, opening one of the folds of the screen, and appearing like a ghost at the end of the room. La Vallière uttered a loud cry, and fell trembling into an armchair, as the king advanced respectfully towards her.

CHAPTER CLXXIV

THE APPARITION

La Vallière very soon recovered from her surprise; for owing to his respectful bearing the king inspired her with more confidence by his presence than his sudden appearance had deprived her of. But as he noticed that what made La Vallière most uneasy was the mystery of his entrance into her room, he explained to her the system of the staircase concealed by the screen, and especially denied being a supernatural appearance.

"Oh, Sire," said La Vallière, shaking her fair head with a most engaging smile, "present or absent, you do not appear to my mind more at one time than at another."—"Which means, Louise—"—"Oh! what you know so well, Sire,—that there is not one moment in which the poor girl whose secret you sur-

prised at Fontainebleau, and whom you came to snatch from the foot of the cross itself, does not think of you."—"Louise, you overwhelm me with joy and happiness."

La Vallière smiled mournfully, and continued: "But, Sire, have you reflected that your ingenious invention could not be of the slightest service to us?"—"Why so? Tell me. I am waiting most anxiously!"—"Because this room in which I abide is liable to be visited at any moment of the day. Madame herself may by chance come here; my companions run in at any moment they please. To fasten the door on the inside would be to denounce myself as plainly as if I had written over it, 'No admittance; the king is here.' Even now, Sire, at this very moment there is nothing to prevent the door from opening, and your Majesty from being seen here."

"In that case," said the king, laughingly, "I should indeed be taken for a phantom, for no one can tell in what way I came here. Now, it is only phantoms who can pass through walls or ceilings."—"Oh, Sire, what an adventure! Reflect for a moment how terrible the scandal would be! Nothing equal to it has ever been said about the maids of honour, poor creatures! —whom evil report, however, hardly ever spares."

"And your conclusion from all this, my dear Louise—come, explain yourself!"—"Alas! forgive me, it is a hard thing to say,—but your Majesty must suppress staircase, plots, and surprises; for the evil consequences which would result from your being found here, believe me, Sire, would be far greater than our happiness in seeing each other."

"Well, dear Louise," replied the king, tenderly, "instead of removing this staircase by which I have ascended, there is a far more simple means, of which you have not thought."—"A means,—another means?"—"Yes, another. Oh, you do not love me as I love you, Louise, since my invention is quicker than yours."

She looked at the king, who held out his hand to her, which she took and gently pressed between her own. "You were saying," continued the king, "that I shall be detected coming here, where any one who pleases can enter."—"Stay, Sire; at this very moment, even while you are speaking about it, I tremble with dread of your being discovered."—"But you would not be found out, Louise, if you were to descend that staircase and go to the rooms underneath."—"Oh, Sire! what do you say?" cried La Vallière, in alarm.

"You do not quite understand me, Louise, since you take

such great offence at my very first word; first of all, do you know to whom the apartments underneath belong?"—"Why, to M. le Comte de Guiche, Sire."—"Not at all; they are M. de Saint-Aignan's."—"Truly?" cried La Vallière! and this exclamation which escaped from the young girl's joyous heart made the king's heart throb with delight.—"Yes, to De Saint-Aignan, our friend," he said.

"But, Sire," returned La Vallière, "I cannot visit M. de Saint-Aignan's rooms any more than I could M. le Comte de Guiche's. It is impossible,—impossible."—"And yet, Louise, I should think that under the safeguard of the king you could venture anything."—"Under the safeguard of the king?" she said, with a look full of tenderness.

"You have faith in my word, I hope."—"Yes, Sire, when you are not present; but when you are present, when you speak to me, when I look upon you, I have faith in nothing."—"What do you need to reassure you?"—"It is scarcely respectful, I know, to doubt the king thus; but to me you are not the king."

"Thank Heaven! I, at least, hope so most fervently; you see how anxiously I am trying to find an expedient. Stay! would the presence of a third person reassure you?"—"The presence of M. de Saint-Aignan would, certainly."—"Really, Louise, you wound my heart by your suspicions."

Louise did not answer. She merely looked steadfastly at him with that clear, piercing gaze which penetrates the very heart. and said softly to herself, "Alas, alas! it is not you of whom I am afraid,—it is not you upon whom my doubts would fall."—"Well," said the king, sighing, "I agree; and M. de Saint-Aignan, who enjoys the inestimable privilege of reassuring you, shall always be present at our conversations, I promise you."—"Really and truly, Sire?"—"Upon my honour as a gentleman; and you, on your side—"

"Oh, wait, Sire! that is not all yet."—"Still something else, Louise?"—"Oh, certainly! do not go so fast, for we are not yet at the end, Sire."—"Well, finish by rending my heart!"—"You perfectly well understand, Sire, that such conversations ought at least to have a reasonable motive of some kind for M. de Saint-Aignan."

"A reasonable motive," returned the king, in a tone of tender reproach.—"Certainly, Sire. Consider!"—"Dear Louise, every shade of delicacy of feeling is yours, and my only wish is to equal you on that point. It shall be just as you wish; therefore our conversation shall have a reasonable subject, and

I have already hit upon one; so that from to-morrow, if you like—"—"To-morrow?"—"Do you mean to say that that is not soon enough?" exclaimed the king, caressing La Vallière's throbbing hand between his own.

At this moment the sound of steps was heard in the corridor. "Sire, Sire!" cried La Vallière, "some one is coming; do you hear? Oh, fly, fly, I implore you!" The king made but one bound from his chair to conceal himself behind the screen. It was time; for as he drew one of the folds before him, the handle of the door was turned, and Montalais appeared at the threshold. As a matter of course, she entered quite naturally and without any ceremony; for she well knew, the slyboots, that to knock discreetly at the door beforehand would be showing a suspicion towards La Vallière which would be displeasing to her. She accordingly entered; and after a rapid glance around, which showed her two chairs very close to each other, she was so long in shutting the door, which seemed unaccountably difficult to close that the king had ample time to raise the trap-door, and to descend again to De Saint-Aignan's room.

A noise imperceptible to any ear less acute than hers warned Montalais of the disappearance of the king; she then succeeded in closing the rebellious door, and approached La Vallière. "Louise," she said to her, "I want to talk to you, and seriously, too, if you will permit."

Louise, agitated as she was, heard not without secret alarm this word *seriously*, upon which Montalais had purposely laid stress. "Good heavens! my dear Aure," she murmured, "what is the matter now?"—"The matter is, my dear friend, that Madame suspects everything."

"Everything of what?"—"Is there any occasion for us to enter into explanations, and do you not understand what I mean? Come, you must have noticed the fluctuations in Madame's humour during several days past; you must have noticed how she first kept you close beside her, then dismissed you, and then sent for you again."—"It is indeed strange; but I am used to her caprices."—"Wait a moment! You noticed also that Madame, after having excluded you from the excursion yesterday, sent you her orders to take part in it."—"Yes, I did notice it, of course."

"Well, it seems that Madame has now succeeded in obtaining sufficient information; for she has now gone straight to the point, as there is nothing further left in France to withstand the torrent which sweeps away all obstacles before it,—you

know what I mean by the torrent?" La Vallière hid her face in her hands. "I mean," continued Montalais, pitilessly, "that torrent which has burst through the gates of the Carmelites of Chaillot, and overthrown all the prejudices of the court, as well at Fontainebleau as at Paris."—"Alas, alas!" murmured La Vallière, her face still covered by her hands, and her tears streaming through her fingers.

"Oh, don't distress yourself in that manner, for you have only heard half of your troubles."—"In Heaven's name," exclaimed the young girl, in great anxiety, "what is the matter, now?"—"Well, then, this is how the matter stands. Madame, who can no longer rely upon any further assistance in France,—for she has, one after the other, made use of the two queens, of Monsieur, and the whole court too,—now bethinks herself of a certain person who has certain pretended rights over you."

La Vallière became white as a waxen figure. "This person," continued Montalais, "is not in Paris at this moment, but, if I am not mistaken, is in England."—"Yes, yes," breathed La Vallière, almost crushed with the weight of her anguish.—"And this person is to be found, I think, at the court of Charles II.; am I right?"—"Yes."—"Well, this evening a letter has been despatched by Madame to St. James's, with directions for the courier to go straight on to Hampton Court, which it seems is one of the royal residences, situated about a dozen miles from London."

"Yes; well?"—"Well, as Madame writes regularly to London once a fortnight, and as the usual courier left for London not more than three days ago, I have been thinking that some serious circumstance could alone have induced her to take up her pen again so soon, for you know Madame is a very indolent correspondent."—"Oh, yes!"—"This letter has been written, therefore,—something tells me so, at least,—on your account."—"On my account?" repeated the unhappy girl, mechanically.

"And I, who saw the letter lying on Madame's desk before she sealed it, fancied I could read—"—"What did you fancy you could read?"—"I might possibly have been mistaken, though—"—"Tell me,—what was it?"—"The name of Bragelonne."

La Vallière rose, a prey to the most painful agitation. "Montalais," she said, her voice broken by sobs, "all the smiling dreams of youth and innocence have fled already. I have nothing now to conceal, either from you or from any one else. My life is exposed to every one's inspection, and can be opened

like a book, in which all the world can read, from the king himself to the first passer-by. Aure, dearest Aure, what can I do?—what will become of me?" Montalais approached close to her, and said, "Consult your own heart, of course."

"Well, I do not love M. de Bragelonne. When I say I do not love him, understand that I love him as the most affectionate sister could love the best of brothers; but that is not what he requires, nor what I have promised him."—"In fact, you love the king," said Montalais, "and that is a sufficiently good excuse."—"Yes, I do love the king," hoarsely murmured the young girl, "and I have paid dearly enough for the right to pronounce those words. And now, Montalais, tell me,—what can you do, either for me or against me, in my present position?"

"You must speak more clearly still."—"What am I to say, then?"—"And so you have nothing very particular to tell me?"—"No!" said Louise, in astonishment.—"Very good; and so all you have to ask me is my advice respecting M. Raoul?"—"Nothing else."—"It is a very delicate subject," replied Montalais.—"No, it is nothing of the kind. Ought I to marry him in order to keep the promise I made, or ought I to continue to listen to the king?"

"You have really placed me in a very difficult position," said Montalais, smiling. "You ask me if you ought to marry Raoul, whose friend I am, and whom I shall mortally offend in giving my opinion against him; and then, you ask me if you should cease to listen to the king,—the king whose subject I am, and whom I should also offend if I were to advise you in a particular way. Ah, Louise, Louise, you seem to hold a difficult position at a very cheap rate."—"You have not understood me, Aure," said La Vallière, wounded by the slightly mocking tone which Montalais had assumed. "If I speak of marrying M. de Bragelonne, it is because I can marry him without causing him any dissatisfaction; on the other hand, if I listen to the king, he becomes the usurper of a possession of only moderate worth, indeed, but to which love lends a certain appearance of value. What I ask you, then, is to tell me some means of disengaging myself honourably either from the one or from the other; or rather, I ask you from which side you think I can free myself most honourably."

"My dear Louise," replied Montalais, after a pause, "I am not one of those seven wise men of Greece, and I have no invariable rules of conduct; but on the other hand I have a little experience, and I can assure you that no woman ever asks for

such advice as you are now asking without being in a terrible state of embarrassment. Now, you have made a solemn promise which every principle of honour would require you to fulfil; if therefore you are embarrassed, in consequence of having undertaken such an engagement, it is not a stranger's advice (every one is a stranger to a heart full of love),—it is not my advice, I repeat, which will extricate you from your embarrassment. I shall not give it you, therefore; and for a greater reason still,—because, were I in your place, I should feel much more embarrassed after the advice than before it. All I can do is to repeat what I have already said,—do you wish for my assistance?"—"Yes, yes."—"Very well; that is all. Tell me in what way you wish me to help you,—tell me for and against whom; in this way we shall not make any blunders."

"But, first of all," said La Vallière, pressing her companion's hand, "for whom or against whom do you declare yourself?"—"For you, if you are really and truly my friend."—"Are you not Madame's confidante?"—"I shall be the more useful to you. If I were not to know what is going on in that direction, I should not be able to aid you, and consequently you would not derive any advantage from my acquaintance. Friendships live and thrive upon reciprocal benefits."

"In short, then, you will remain at the same time Madame's friend also?"—"Evidently. Do you complain of that?"—"No," said La Vallière, thoughtfully; for that cynical frankness appeared to her an offence addressed both to the woman and to the friend.—"All well and good, then," said Montalais, "for in that case you would be very foolish."

"You will serve me, then?"—"Devotedly so, especially if you will serve me in return."—"One would almost say that you did not know my heart," said La Vallière, looking at Montalais with her eyes wide open in astonishment.—"Why, the fact is that since we have belonged to the court, my dear Louise, we are very much changed."—"In what way?"—"It is very simple. Were you the second Queen of France yonder, at Blois?"

La Vallière hung down her head, and began to weep. Montalais looked at her with an indescribable expression, and murmured, "Poor girl!" and then, adding, "Poor king!" she kissed Louise on the forehead, and returned to her apartment, where Malicorne was waiting for her.

CHAPTER CLXXV

THE PORTRAIT

In that malady which is termed love the paroxysms succeed one another at intervals, always more rapid from the moment when the disease declares itself. Later, the paroxysms are less frequent in proportion as the cure approaches. This being laid down as an axiom in general, and as the beginning of a chapter in particular, we will now proceed with our recital. The next day, the day fixed by the king for the first conversation in De Saint-Aignan's room, La Vallière, on opening one of the folds of the screen, found upon the floor a note in the king's handwriting. This note had been passed through the opening in the floor from the lower apartment to her own. No indiscreet hand or curious gaze was concerned in the bringing of this simple paper. This was one of Malicorne's ideas. Having seen how very serviceable De Saint-Aignan would become to the king on account of the situation of his apartment, he did not wish that the courtier should become still more indispensable as a messenger, and so he had, on his own private authority, reserved this last post for himself. La Vallière most eagerly read the letter, which fixed two o'clock that same afternoon for the rendezvous, and which indicated the way of raising the trap-door in the flooring. "Make yourself look as beautiful as possible," added the postscript of the letter,—words which astonished the young girl, but at the same time reassured her.

The hours passed away very slowly, but the time fixed arrived at last. As punctual as the priestess Hero, Louise lifted up the trap-door at the last stroke of the hour of two, and found the king upon the upper steps, waiting for her with the greatest respect, in order to give her his hand to descend. This delicacy and deference affected her very powerfully. At the foot of the staircase the two lovers found the count, who with a smile and a low reverence distinguished by the best taste expressed his thanks to La Vallière for the honour she conferred upon him. Then, turning towards the king, he said, "Sire, our man is here." La Vallière looked at the king with some uneasiness. "Mademoiselle," said the king, "if I have begged you to do me the honour of coming down here, it was from an interested motive. I have procured a most admirable portrait-painter, who is

celebrated for the fidelity of his likenesses, and I wish you to be kind enough to authorise him to paint yours. Besides, if you positively wish it, the portrait shall remain in your own possession."

La Vallière blushed. "You see," said the king to her, "we shall not be three only; we shall be four. And so long as we are not alone, there can be as many present as you please." La Vallière gently pressed her royal lover's hand.

"Let us pass into the next room, if your Majesty pleases," said De Saint-Aignan, opening the door to let his guests precede him.

The king walked behind La Vallière, fixing his eyes lingeringly and passionately upon her neck, as white as snow, upon which her long fair ringlets fell in heavy masses. La Vallière was dressed in a thick silk robe of pearl-grey colour, with a tinge of rose, with jet ornaments, which displayed to greater effect the dazzling purity of her skin; she held in her slender and transparent hands a bouquet of heartsease, Bengal roses, and clematis, surrounded with leaves of the tenderest green, above which uprose, like a tiny goblet shedding perfumes, a Haarlem tulip of grey and violet tints, of a pure and beautiful species, which had cost the gardener five years' toil in combinations and the king five thousand livres. Louis had placed this bouquet in La Vallière's hand as he saluted her.

In the room the door of which De Saint-Aignan had just opened, a young man with beautiful black eyes and long brown hair was standing, dressed in a loose velvet coat. It was the painter; his canvas was quite ready, and his palette prepared for use. He bowed to Mademoiselle de la Vallière with the grave curiosity of an artist who is studying his model, saluted the king discreetly, as if he did not recognise him, and as he would have saluted any other gentleman. Then, leading Mademoiselle de la Vallière to the seat which he had arranged for her, he begged her to sit down. The young girl assumed an attitude graceful and unconstrained, her hands occupied, and her limbs reclining on cushions; and in order that her gaze might not assume a vague or affected expression, the painter begged her to choose some kind of occupation, so as to engage her attention. Whereupon Louis XIV., smiling, sat down on the cushions at the feet of his mistress; so that she, in the reclining posture she had assumed, leaning back in the arm-chair, holding her flowers in her hand, and he, with his eyes raised towards hers and fixed devouringly on her face, together formed so charming a group

that the artist contemplated it with professional delight, while on his side De Saint-Aignan regarded them with feelings of envy.

The painter sketched rapidly; and very soon beneath the touches of the brush there started into life, out of the grey background, the gentle, poetry-breathing face, with its soft calm eyes and delicately tinted cheeks, framed in the fair hair. The lovers, however, spoke but little, and looked at each other, a good deal; sometimes their eyes became so languishing in their gaze that the painter was obliged to interrupt his work in order to avoid representing an Erycina instead of a La Vallière. It was on such occasions that De Saint-Aignan came to the rescue, and recited verses, or repeated one of those little tales related by Patru and written so cleverly by Tallemant des Réaux. Sometimes La Vallière was fatigued, and a recess was taken; and immediately a tray of precious porcelain laden with the most beautiful fruits which could be obtained, and rich wines distilling their bright colours in chased silver, served as accessories to the picture of which the painter could trace but the most ephemeral resemblance. Louis was intoxicated with love, La Vallière with happiness, De Saint-Aignan with ambition; and the painter was storing up recollections for his old age. Two hours passed away in this manner; and four o'clock having struck, La Vallière rose and made a sign to the king. Louis also rose, approached the picture, and addressed a few flattering remarks to the artist. De Saint-Aignan extolled the picture, which, as he pretended, was already beginning to assume an accurate resemblance. La Vallière, in her turn, blushingly thanked the painter, and passed into the next room, where the king followed her after having previously summoned De Saint-Aignan.

"Will you not come to-morrow?" he said to La Vallière—"Oh, Sire, pray consider that some one will be sure to come to my room, and will not find me there."—"Well!"—"What will become of me in that case?"—"You are very apprehensive, Louise."—"But suppose Madame were to send for me."

"Oh!" replied the king, "will the day never come when you yourself will tell me to brave everything, so that I may not have to leave you again?"—"On that day, then, Sire, I shall be quite out of my mind, and you ought not to believe me."—"To-morrow, Louise." La Vallière sighed; but without the strength to oppose her royal lover's wish, she repeated, "To-morrow, then, since you desire it, Sire;" and with these words she ran up the stairs lightly, and disappeared from her lover's gaze.

"Well, sire?" inquired De Saint-Aignan, when she had left.—

"Well, De Saint-Aignan, yesterday I thought myself the happiest of men."—"And does your majesty, then," said the count, smiling, "regard yourself to-day as the unhappiest of men?"—"No; but my love for her is an unquenchable thirst. In vain do I drink, in vain do I swallow the drops of water which your industry procures for me; the more I drink, the more I thirst."—"Sire, that is in some degree your own fault, and your Majesty alone has made the position such as it is."—"You are right."—"In that case, therefore, the means to be happy is to fancy yourself satisfied, and to wait."

"Wait! you know that word, then?"—"There, there, Sire, do not despair! I have already made endeavours in your behalf; I will still endeavour." The king shook his head in a despairing manner. "What, Sire! have you not been satisfied hitherto?"—"Oh, yes, indeed yes, my dear De Saint-Aignan; but find, for Heaven's sake, some further means yet."—"Sire, I undertake to do my best, and that is all I can do."

The king wished to see the portrait again, as he was unable to see the original. He suggested several alterations to the painter, and took his departure; and then De Saint-Aignan dismissed the artist. The easel, paints, and painter himself had scarcely gone, when Malicorne showed his head at the doorway. He was received by De Saint-Aignan with open arms, but still with a little sadness; for the cloud which had passed across the royal sun veiled, in its turn, the faithful satellite, and Malicorne at the first glance perceived the pall upon De Saint-Aignan's face.

"Oh, Monsieur the Count," he said, "how sad you look!"—"And good reason, too, my dear M. Malicorne. Will you believe that the king is not satisfied?"—"Not satisfied with his staircase?"—"Oh, no; on the contrary, he is delighted with the staircase."—"The decorations of the apartments, I suppose, are not according to his taste."—"Oh, he has not even thought of that! No, indeed; what has dissatisfied the king—"—"I will tell you, Monsieur the Count,—he is dissatisfied at finding himself the fourth person at a rendezvous of this kind. How is it possible, Monsieur the Count, that you could not have guessed that?"

"Why, how could I have guessed that, dear M. Malicorne, when I only followed the king's instructions to the very letter?"—"Did his Majesty really insist upon your being present?"—"Positively."—"And also required that the painter whom I met downstairs just now should be here too?"—"He insisted,

M. Malicorne,—he insisted upon it."—"In that case I can easily understand why his Majesty is dissatisfied."—"What! dissatisfied that I have so punctually and literally obeyed his orders? I don't understand you."

Malicorne scratched his ear as he asked, "What time did the king fix for the rendezvous in your apartment?"—"Two o'clock."—"And you were waiting for the king, here?"—"Ever since half-past one; for it would have been a fine thing for me to have been unpunctual with his Majesty." Malicorne, notwithstanding his respect for De Saint-Aignan, could not resist shrugging his shoulders. "And the painter," he said,—"did the king wish him to be here at two o'clock also?"—"No; but I had him waiting here from mid-day. Far better, you know, for a painter to be kept waiting a couple of hours than the king a single minute."

Malicorne began to laugh to himself. "Come, dear M. Malicorne," said Saint-Aignan, "laugh less at me, and speak a little more freely, I beg."—"Well, then, Monsieur the Count, if you wish the king to be a little better satisfied the next time he comes—"—"*Ventre saint-gris!* as his grandfather used to say; I should say I did wish it!"—"Well, when the king comes to-morrow, go away on a most pressing matter of business, which cannot possibly be postponed, and stay away for twenty minutes."

"What! leave the king alone for twenty minutes?" cried De Saint-Aignan, in alarm.—"Very well, do as you like; don't pay any attention to what I say," said Malicorne, moving towards the door.—"Nay, nay, dear M. Malicorne; on the contrary, go on,—I begin to understand you. But the painter—"—"Oh! the painter must be half an hour late."—"Half an hour,—do you really think so?"—"Yes, I do, decidedly."—"Very well, then, I will do as you tell me."

"And my opinion is that you will find you are doing perfectly right. Will you allow me to come and make a few inquiries to-morrow?"—"Certainly."—"I have the honour to be your most respectful servant, M. de Saint-Aignan," said Malicorne, bowing himself out.—"There is no doubt that fellow has more wit than I have," said De Saint-Aignan, compelled by his conviction.

CHAPTER CLXXVI

HAMPTON COURT

THE revelation which Montalais made to La Vallière, in a preceding chapter, of which we have been witnesses, very naturally suggests a return to the principal hero of this tale,—a poor wandering knight, roving about at the king's caprice. If our reader will be good enough to follow us, we will, as he did, cross that strait, more stormy than the Euripus, which separates Calais from Dover; we will speed across that green and fertile country, with its numerous little streams, round about Charing, Maidstone, and many other villages and towns, each more picturesque than the others, and finally arrive at London. Thence, like bloodhounds following a track, after having ascertained that Raoul had made his first stay at Whitehall, his second at St. James's, and having learned that he had been warmly received by Monk, and introduced into the best society of Charles II.'s court, we will follow him to one of Charles II.'s summer residences, near the town of Kingston, at Hampton Court, situated on the Thames.

This river is not yet, at that spot, the proud highway which bears upon its broad bosom its thousands of travellers every day, and whose waters are as black and troubled as those of Cocytus, as it boastfully asserts, "I, too, am the sea." No; at Hampton Court it is a soft and murmuring stream, with moss-grown banks, reflecting in its broad mirror the willows and beeches, on which may occasionally be seen a light boat lying unused among the tall reeds, in a little bay bordered by alders and forget-me-nots. The surrounding country on all sides seemed smiling in happiness and wealth; the brick cottages, from whose chimneys the blue smoke was slowly ascending, peeped forth from the belts of green holly which environed them; children dressed in red frocks appeared and disappeared amid the high grass, like poppies bowed by the gentle breath of the passing breeze. The fat white sheep ruminated with closed eyes under the shade of the stunted aspens; while far and near the kingfisher, clad in emerald and gold, skimmed swiftly along the surface of the water like a magic ball, heedlessly touching, as he passed, the line of his brother angler, who sat watching in his boat the tench and the shad.

High above this paradise of dark shadows and soft light arose the palace of Hampton Court, built by Wolsey, and made magnificent for a king,—a residence which the haughty cardinal had been obliged, timid courtier that he was, to offer to his master, Henry VIII., who had frowned with envy and cupidity at his first view of the new palace. Hampton Court, with its brick walls, its large windows, its handsome iron gates, as well as its curious bell-turrets, its retired walks, and interior fountains like those of the Alhambra, was a perfect bower of roses, jasmine, and clematis. It gave joy to every sense, of sight and smell particularly, and formed a most charming frame for the picture of love which Charles II. displayed among the voluptuous paintings of Titian, Pordenone, and Vandyck,—he who had in his gallery the portrait of Charles I., martyr king, and could show upon the wainscoting the holes made by the balls of the Puritan soldiers of Cromwell, on the 24th of August, 1648, at the time they had brought Charles I. prisoner to Hampton Court. There it was that the king, ever intoxicated with pleasure and amusement, held his court; being a poet in feeling, he thought himself justified in redeeming, by a whole day of voluptuousness, every minute which had been formerly passed in anguish and misery.

It was not the soft greensward of Hampton Court,—so soft that it almost gave the impression of velvet,—nor was it the beds of flowers, with their variegated hues, encircling the foot of every tree, with rose-trees many feet in height, which spread out their wealth of colour like sheaves of fireworks,—nor even the enormous lime-trees, whose branches swept the earth like willows, offering a ready concealment for love or reflection beneath the shade of their foliage,—it was none of these things for which Charles II. loved his beautiful palace of Hampton Court. Perhaps it might have been that beautiful sheet of water, which the cool breeze rippled like the wavy undulations of Cleopatra's hair; waters bedecked with cresses and white water-lilies, with hardy bulbs, which half unfold themselves to disclose the golden-coloured germs shining in their milk-white covering; murmuring waters, on the bosom of which the black swans majestically floated, and the restless water-fowl, with their tender broods covered with silken down, darted restlessly in every direction, in pursuit of the insects among the flags or the frogs in their mossy retreats. Perhaps it might have been the enormous hollies, with their varied foliage; or the tasteful bridges spanning the canals; or the fawns browsing

in the endless avenues of the park; or the numberless birds which hopped and flew about the borders of box and clover. It might well have been any of these charms, for Hampton Court possessed them all. There were, too, arbours of white roses, which climbed and trailed along the lofty trellises, showering down upon the ground their snowy and fragrant petals; in the park were ancient sycamores, with mossy trunks, which buried their roots in that luxuriant mould, so rich in romance. But, no; what Charles II. most loved in Hampton Court was the charming figures who when mid-day was passed flitted to and fro along his terraces. Like Louis XIV., he had had their wealth of beauty painted for his gallery by one of the great artists of the period,—an artist who well knew the secret of transferring to canvas a ray of light which had escaped from their beaming eyes laden with love and love's delights.

The day of our arrival at Hampton Court is almost as clear and bright as a summer's day in France; the atmosphere is laden with the delicious perfume of the geraniums, sweet-peas, syringas, and heliotrope which are scattered around in profusion. It is past mid-day! and the king, having dined after his return from hunting, has paid a visit to Lady Castlemaine, the lady who was reputed at the time to be the mistress of his heart; and after this proof of his devotion, he is at leisure to indulge in infidelity to her until evening arrives. Love and amusement ruled the whole court. It was the period when ladies would seriously ask their cavaliers their opinion upon a foot more or less captivating, according to whether it wore a pink or a green silk stocking. It was the period when Charles II. had declared that there was no salvation for a woman without green silk stockings, because Miss Lucy Stewart wore them of that colour. While the king is endeavouring to inspire others with his preferences on this point, we will ourselves bend our steps towards an avenue of beech-trees opposite the terrace, and listen to the conversation of a young girl in a dark-coloured dress, who is walking with another of about her own age dressed in lilac and dark blue. They crossed the lawn, in the middle of which arose a beautiful fountain, with figures of sirens executed in bronze; and, talking as they went, walked along the terrace, from which many brick-paved walks led at intervals to summer-houses in the park, various in form and ornaments. These summer-houses were nearly all occupied; and so the two young women passed on, the one blushing deeply, while the other seemed dreamingly silent. At last, having reached the

end of the terrace which looks on the river, and finding there a cool retreat, they sat down close to each other.

"Where are we going, Stewart?" said the younger of the two ladies to her companion. "My dear Grafton, we are going, you perceive, where you yourself led the way."—"I?"—"Yes, you,—to the extremity of the palace, towards that seat yonder, where the young Frenchman is sitting and sighing."

Miss Mary Grafton stopped short, and said, "No, no; I am not going there."—"Why not?"—"Let us go back, Stewart."—"Nay, on the contrary, let us go on and have an explanation."—"About what?"—"About how it happens that the Vicomte de Bragelonne always accompanies you in all your walks, as you invariably accompany him in his."

"And you conclude either that he loves me or that I love him?"—"Why not? He is a most agreeable gentleman. No one hears me, I hope," said Miss Lucy Stewart, as she turned round with a smile, which indicated, moreover, that her uneasiness on the subject was not extreme.—"No, no," said Mary; "the king is in his oval summer-house with the Duke of Buckingham."

"Oh! speaking of the duke, Mary, it seems he has constituted himself your knight since his return from France; how is your own heart in that direction?" Mary Graften shrugged her shoulders with seeming indifference. "Well, well, I will ask the handsome Bragelonne about that," said Stewart, laughing; "let us go and find him at once."—"What for?"—"I wish to speak to him."

"Not yet; one word before you do. Come, Stewart, you who know so many of the king's little secrets, tell me why is M. de Bragelonne in England, and what is he doing here?"—"What every gentleman does who is sent as an envoy from his sovereign to another."—"That may be; but, seriously, although politics are not our forte, we know enough to be satisfied that M. de Bragelonne has no mission of any serious import here."—"Well, then, listen," said Stewart, with assumed gravity; "for your sake I am going to betray a State secret. Shall I tell you the nature of the letter which King Louis XIV. gave M. de Bragelonne for King Charles II.? I will; here it is:—

"'My Brother,—The bearer of this is a gentleman attached to my court, and the son of one whom you regard most warmly. Treat him kindly, I beg, and try to make him like England.'"

"Did it say that?"—"Word for word,—or something very like it. I will not answer for the form, but the substance I am

sure of."—"Well, and what conclusion do you, or rather what conclusion does the king, draw from that?"—"That the King of France has his own reasons for removing M. de Bragelonne, and for getting him married—somewhere else than in France."

"So that in consequence of this letter—"—"King Charles received M. de Bragelonne, as you are aware, in the most distinguished and friendly manner; the handsomest apartments in Whitehall were allotted to him; and as you are the most precious person in his court, inasmuch as you have rejected his heart,—nay, do not blush,—he wished you to take a fancy to this Frenchman, and he was desirous to confer upon him so valuable a prize. And this is the reason why you, the heiress of three hundred thousand pounds, a future duchess, and one so beautiful and so good, have been thrown in M. de Bragelonne's way in all the promenades and parties of pleasure to which he was invited. In fact, it was a plot, a kind of conspiracy. If you wish to further it, I will aid you." Miss Mary smiled with that charming expression which was habitual to her, and pressing her companion's arm, said, "Thank the king, Lucy."—"Yes, yes; but the Duke of Buckingham is jealous, so take care!"

Hardly had she pronounced these words, when the duke appeared from one of the pavilions on the terrace, and approaching the two girls with a smile said: "You are mistaken, Miss Lucy. I am not jealous; and the proof, Miss Mary, is yonder, —in the person of the Vicomte de Bragelonne himself, who ought to be the cause of my jealousy, but who is dreaming in pensive solitude. Poor fellow! Allow me to surrender to him your delightful society for a few minutes, while I avail myself of these few minutes to converse with Miss Lucy Stewart, to whom I have something to say." And then, bowing to Lucy, he said, "Will you do me the honour to accept my hand, in order that I may lead you to the king, who is waiting for us?" With these words Buckingham, still smiling, took Miss Stewart's hand and led her away.

When by herself, Mary Grafton, her head gently inclined towards her shoulder with that indolent grace which distinguishes young English girls, remained for a moment with her eyes fixed on Raoul, but as if uncertain what to do. At last, after first blushing violently and then turning deadly pale, thus revealing the internal combat which agitated her heart, she seemed to make up her mind, and with a tolerably firm step advanced towards the seat on which Raoul was sitting, buried in the profoundest meditation, as we have already said. The

sound of Miss Mary's steps, light as they were, upon the greensward aroused Raoul; he turned his head, perceived the young girl, and walked forward to meet the companion whom his happy destiny had thrown in his way.

"I have been sent to you, Monsieur," said Mary Grafton; "will you accept me?"—"To whom is my gratitude due for so great a happiness?" replied Raoul.—"To the Duke of Buckingham," replied Mary, affecting a gaiety which she did not really feel.—"To the Duke of Buckingham, to him who so passionately seeks your charming society! Am I really to believe that you are serious, Mademoiselle?"

"The fact is, Monsieur, you perceive, that everything seems to conspire to make us pass the best, or rather the longest, part of our days together. Yesterday it was the king who desired me to beg you to seat yourself next to me at dinner; to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham himself who begs me to come and seat myself near you on this bench."—"And he has gone away in order to leave us together?" asked Raoul, with some embarrassment.—"Look yonder, at the turning of that path; he is just going out of sight with Miss Stewart. Are these polite attentions usual in France, Monsieur the Viscount?"—"I cannot very precisely say what people do in France, Mademoiselle, for I can hardly be called a Frenchman. I have resided in many countries, and almost always as a soldier; and then I have spent a long period of my life in the country. I am almost a savage."

"You are not contented in England, I fear."—"I scarcely know," said Raoul, inattentively, and sighing deeply at the same time.—"What! you do not know?"—"Forgive me," said Raoul, shaking his head and collecting his thoughts, "I did not understand you."

"Oh," said the young girl, sighing in her turn, "how wrong the Duke of Buckingham was to send me here!"—"Wrong!" said Raoul, quickly. "You are right; for I am but a rude, uncouth companion, and my society annoys you. The duke was, indeed, very wrong to send you."—"It is precisely," replied the young lady, in a clear, calm voice, "because your society does not annoy me, that the duke was wrong to send me to you."

It was now Raoul's turn to blush. "But," he resumed, "how happens it that the Duke of Buckingham should send you to me, and why should you have come? The duke loves you, and you love him."—"No," replied Mary, seriously, "the duke

does not love me, because he is in love with Madame la Duchesse d'Orléans; and as for myself, I have no affection for the duke."

Raoul looked at the young girl with astonishment. "Are you a friend of the Duke of Buckingham, Viscount?" she inquired.—"The Duke has honoured me by calling me so ever since we met in France."—"You are simple acquaintances, then?"—"No; for the duke is the most intimate friend of one whom I regard as a brother."—"M. le Comte de Guiche?"—"Yes, Mademoiselle."—"Who is in love with Madame la Duchesse d'Orléans?"—"Oh! what is that you are saying."—"And who loves him in return," continued the young girl, quietly.

Raoul bent down his head; and Miss Mary Grafton, sighing deeply, continued: "They are very happy. But leave me, M. de Bragelonne; for the Duke of Buckingham has given you a very troublesome commission in offering me as a companion in your promenade. Your heart is elsewhere, and it is with the greatest difficulty you can be charitable enough to lend me your attention. Confess truly; it would be unfair on your part, Viscount, not to confess it."—"Madame, I do confess it."

She looked at him steadily. He was so noble and so handsome in his bearing, his clear eye revealed so much gentleness, candour, and resolution, that the idea could not possibly enter the mind of a lady so accomplished as Miss Mary, that he was either rudely discourteous or a mere simpleton. She only perceived that he loved another woman, and not herself, with the whole strength of his heart. "Ah, I now understand you," she said; "you have left your heart behind you in France." Raoul bowed. "The duke is aware of your affection?"—"No one knows it," replied Raoul.—"Why, therefore, do you tell me? Nay, answer me."—"I cannot."

"It is for me, then, to anticipate an explanation. You do not wish to tell me anything, because you are now convinced that I do not love the duke; because you see that I possibly might have loved you; because you are a gentleman of noble and delicate sentiments; and because, instead of accepting, even were it for the mere amusement of the passing hour, a hand which was almost pressed upon you, and instead of meeting my smiles with a smiling lip, you, who are young, have preferred to tell me, whom men have called beautiful, 'My heart is far away in France.' For this I thank you, M. de Bragelonne; you are indeed a noble-hearted, noble-minded man, and I regard you yet more for it,—as a friend. And now let us

cease speaking of myself, and talk of your own affairs. Forget that I have ever spoken to you of myself; tell me why you are sad, and why you have become more than usually so during the last few days."

Raoul was deeply and sensibly moved by her sweet and melancholy tone; and as he could not at the moment find a word to say, the young girl again came to his assistance. "Pity me," she said. "My mother was born in France, and I can therefore affirm that I too am French in blood as well as in feeling; but the heavy atmosphere and characteristic gloom of England seem to weigh like a burden upon me. Sometimes my dreams are golden-hued and full of wondrous enjoyment; but suddenly a mist arises and overspreads my dreams and blots them out for ever. Such, indeed, is the case at the present moment. Forgive me, I have now said enough on that subject; give me your hand, and relate your griefs to me as to a friend."—"You say you are French in blood and in feeling?"—"Yes; not only, I repeat, was my mother French, but, further still, as my father, a friend of King Charles I., was exiled in France, I, during the trial of that prince as well as during the Protector's life, was brought up in Paris; at the Restoration of King Charles II. my poor father returned to England, where he died almost immediately afterwards; and then King Charles created me a duchess, and has dowered me according to my rank."

"Have you still any relatives in France?" Raoul inquired with the deepest interest.—"I have a sister there, my senior by seven or eight years, who was married in France, and was early left a widow; her name is Madame de Bellière. Do you know her?" she added, observing Raoul start suddenly.—"I have heard her name mentioned."—"She, too, is in love; and her last letters inform me that she is happy, and her affection is, I conclude, returned. I have told you, M. de Bragelonne, that I share her nature; but I do not share her happiness. But let us now speak of yourself; whom do you love in France?"

"A young girl, as soft and as pure as a lily."—"But if she loves you, why are you sad?"—"I have been told that she has ceased to love me."—"You do not believe it, I trust?"—"He who wrote me so does not sign his letter."—"An anonymous denunciation! some treachery, be assured!" said Miss Grafton.—"Stay!" said Raoul, showing the young girl a letter which he had read a hundred times. She took it from his hand, and read as follows:—

"VISCOUNT,—You are perfectly right to amuse yourself yonder with the lovely faces of Charles II.'s court, for at Louis XIV.'s court the castle in which your affections are enshrined is besieged. Stay in London altogether, poor Viscount, or return without delay to Paris."

"There is no signature," said Miss Mary.—"None."—"Believe it not, then."—"Very good; but here is a second letter, from M. de Guiche, which says,—

"'MY FRIEND,—I am lying here wounded and ill. Return, Raoul, oh, return!"

"What do you intend to do?" inquired the young girl, with a feeling of oppression at her heart.—"My intention, as soon as I received this letter, was immediately to take my leave of the king."—"When did you receive it?"—"The day before yesterday."—"It is dated from Fontainebleau."—"A singular circumstance, is it not?—for the court is now at Paris. At all events, I would have set off; but when I mentioned my departure to the king, he began to laugh, and said to me: 'How comes it, Monsieur the Ambassador, that you think of leaving? Has your sovereign recalled you?' I coloured, naturally enough, for I was confused by the question; for the fact is, the king himself sent me here, and I have received no order to return."

Mary frowned in deep thought, and said, "Do you remain, then?"—"I must, Mademoiselle."—"And does the one whom you love write to you?"—"Never."—"Never, do you say? Does she not love you, then?"—"At least, she has not written to me since my departure, although she used occasionally to write to me before. I trust that she may have been prevented."

"Hush! the duke is here."

Buckingham at that moment was seen at the end of the walk, approaching towards them, alone and smiling; he advanced slowly, and held out his hands to them both. "Have you arrived at an understanding?" he said.—"About what?"—"About whatever might render you happy, dear Mary, and make Raoul less miserable."—"I do not understand you, my Lord," said Raoul.

"That is, my view of the subject, Miss Mary; do you wish me to mention it before M. de Bragelonne?" he said with a smile.—"If you mean," replied the young girl, haughtily, "that I was not indisposed to love M. de Bragelonne, that is useless,

for I have told him so myself." Buckingham reflected for a moment, and without seeming in any way discountenanced, as she expected, he said: "My reason for leaving you with M. de Bragelonne was that I thoroughly knew your refined delicacy of feeling, no less than the perfect loyalty of your mind and heart, and I hoped that M. de Bragelonne's wounded heart might be cured by the hands of such a physician."—"But, my Lord, before you spoke of M. de Bragelonne's heart, you spoke to me of your own. Do you mean me to effect the cure of two hearts at the same time?"—"Perfectly true, Miss Mary; but you will do me the justice to admit that I have long discontinued a useless pursuit, acknowledging that my own wound is incurable."

"My Lord," said Mary, collecting herself for a moment before she spoke, "M. de Bragelonne is happy, for he loves and is beloved. He has no need of such a physician as I."—"M. de Bragelonne," said Buckingham, "is on the very eve of experiencing a serious misfortune, and he has greater need than ever of sympathy and affection."—"Explain yourself, my Lord," inquired Raoul, anxiously.

"No. Gradually I will explain myself; but if you desire it, I can tell Miss Mary what you may not listen to yourself."—"My Lord, you are putting me to the torture; you know something that you wish to conceal from me?"—"I know that Miss Mary Grafton is the most charming object that a heart ill at ease could possibly meet with in its way through life."—"My Lord, I have already told you that the Vicomte de Bragelonne loves elsewhere," said the young girl.

"He is wrong, then."—"Do you assume then to know, my Lord, that I am wrong?"—"Yes."—"But who is it that he loves, then?" exclaimed the young girl.—"He loves a woman who is unworthy of him," said Buckingham, with that calm, collected manner of which an Englishman is alone capable.

Miss Mary Grafton uttered a cry, which together with the remark that Buckingham had that moment made spread over De Bragelonne's features a deadly paleness, arising from the sudden shock and also from a vague fear of impending misfortune. "My Lord," he exclaimed, "you have just pronounced words which without a moment's delay I go to seek an explanation of at Paris."—"You will remain here," said Buckingham, "because you have no right to leave; and no one has the right to quit the service of the king for that of any woman, even were she as worthy of being loved as Mary Grafton is."—"You will

tell me all, then?"—"I will, on condition that you will remain."—"I will remain, if you will promise to speak openly and without reserve."

Thus far had their conversation proceeded, and Buckingham in all probability was on the point of revealing, not indeed all that had taken place, but at least all that he was aware of, when one of the king's attendants appeared at the end of the terrace, and advanced towards the summer-house where the king was sitting with Miss Lucy Stewart. A courier followed him, covered with dust from head to foot, who seemed as if he had but a few moments before dismounted from his horse. "The courier from France! Madame's courier!" exclaimed Raoul, recognising the princess's livery; and while the attendant and the courier advanced towards the king, the duke and Miss Grafton exchanged a look full of intelligence with each other.

CHAPTER CLXXVII

THE COURIER FROM MADAME

CHARLES II. was busily engaged in proving, or in endeavouring to prove, to Miss Stewart that she was the only person for whom he cared at all, and consequently he was swearing for her an affection similar to that which his ancestor Henry IV. had entertained for Gabrielle. Unfortunately for Charles II. he had hit upon an unlucky day,—upon a day when Miss Stewart had taken it into her head to make him jealous; and therefore, instead of being touched by his offer, as the king had hoped, she laughed heartily. "Oh, Sire, Sire," she cried, laughing all the while, "if I were to be unfortunate enough to ask you for a proof of the affection you profess, how easy it would be to see that you are telling a falsehood!"

"Nay, listen to me!" said Charles. "You know my cartoons by Raphael; you know whether I care for them or not; the whole world envies me their possession, as you well know also; my father got Vandyck to purchase them. Would you like me to send them to your house this very day?"—"Oh, no!" replied the young girl. "Pray keep them yourself, Sire; my house is far too small to accommodate such visitors."—"In that case you shall have Hampton Court to put the cartoons in."—"Be

less generous, Sire, and make your love more lasting; that is all I have to ask you."

"I shall never cease to love you; is not that enough?"—"You are laughing, Sire."—"Do you wish me to weep, then?"—"No; but I should like to see you a little more melancholy."

"Thank Heaven, my dear, I have been so long enough,—fourteen years of exile, poverty, and misery. I think I may regard it as a debt discharged; besides, melancholy makes people look so plain."—"Far from that; for look at the young Frenchman!"—"What! the Vicomte de Bragelonne! Are you smitten too? By Heaven, they will all become mad about him, one after the other; but he, on the contrary, has a reason for being melancholy."

"Why so?"—"Oh, indeed! you wish me to betray State secrets to you?"—"If I wish it, you must do it, since you told me you were quite ready to do everything I wished."—"Well, then, he is bored in his own country. Does that satisfy you?"—"Bored?"—"Yes,—a proof that he is a simpleton, do you understand? I allow him to fall in love with Miss Mary Grafton, and he feels bored!"

"Very good; it seems, then, that if you were to find Miss Lucy Stewart indifferent to you, you would readily console yourself by falling in love with Miss Mary Grafton."—"I don't say that. In the first place, you know that Mary Grafton does not care for me; besides, a man can only console himself for a lost affection by the discovery of a new one. Again, however, I repeat, the question is not of myself, but of that young man. One might almost be tempted to call the girl he has left behind him a Helen,—a Helen before her introduction to Paris, of course."

"He has left some one, then?"—"That is to say, some one has left him."—"Poor fellow! so much the worse!"—"What do you mean by 'so much the worse'?"—"Why not? Why did he leave?"—"Do you think it was of his own will that he left?"—"Was he obliged to leave then?"—"He left Paris under orders, my dear Stewart; and—prepare to be surprised—by express orders of the king."

"Ah! I begin to see now."—"At least say nothing at all about it."—"You know very well that I am quite as discreet as any man could be. And so the king sent him away?"—"Yes."—"And during his absence he takes his mistress away from him?"—"Yes; and will you believe it, the silly fellow, instead of thanking the king, is making himself miserable!"

"What! thank the king for depriving him of the woman he loves! Really, Sire, yours is a most ungallant speech."—"But pray understand me! If she whom the king had run off with were a Miss Grafton or a Miss Stewart, I should be of his opinion; nay, I should even think him not half miserable enough; but she is a little, thin, lame thing. Deuce take such fidelity as that! Surely, one can hardly understand how a man can refuse a girl who is rich for one who is poor, a girl who loves him for one who deceives and betrays him."

"Do you think that Mary seriously wishes to please the viscount, Sire?"—"I do, indeed."—"Very good! the viscount will settle down in England; for Mary has a clear head, and when she fixes her mind upon anything, she does so thoroughly."

"Take care, my dear Miss Stewart! If the viscount has any idea of adopting our country, he has not entertained it long, for it was only the day before yesterday that he came to ask permission to leave."—"Which you refused him, I suppose?"—"I should think so, indeed. My royal brother is far too anxious for his absence; and for myself, my *amour propre* is enlisted on his side, for I will never have it said that I had held out as a bait to this young man the noblest and gentlest creature in England—"—"You are very gallant, Sire," said Miss Stewart, with a pretty pout.

"I do not allude to Miss Stewart," said the king; "for she is a bait for royalty, and since she has captivated me, I trust that no one else will be caught by her. I say, then, in short, that the attention I have shown this young man will not have been thrown away; he will stay with us here, will marry here, or I am very much mistaken."—"And I hope that when he is once married and settled, instead of being angry with your Majesty, he will be grateful to you. For every one tries his utmost to please him; even the Duke of Buckingham, which is hardly credible, keeps in the background in his presence."—"And including Miss Stewart, even, who calls him a most finished gentleman."

"Stay, Sire! You have extolled Miss Grafton quite enough; let me now talk a little of De Bragelonne. But, by the by, Sire, your kindness for some time past astonishes me; you think of those who are absent, you forgive those who have done wrong, in fact, you are as nearly perfect as possible. How does it happen—"—"It is because you allow yourself to be loved," he said, beginning to laugh.

"Oh, there must be some other reason!"—"Well, I am

obliging my brother Louis XIV."—"Nay, I must have another reason."—"Well, then, the true motive is that Buckingham strongly recommended the young man to me, saying, 'Sire, I begin by yielding up, in favour of the Vicomte de Bragelonne, all claim to Miss Grafton; I pray you, follow my example.'"—"The duke is, indeed, a true gentleman."—"Oh, of course, of course! It is Buckingham's turn now, I suppose, to turn your head. You seem determined to cross me in everything to-day."

At this moment some one tapped at the door. "Who is it that presumes to interrupt us?" exclaimed Charles, impatiently.—"Really, Sire, you are extremely vain with your 'Who is it that presumes?' and in order to punish you for it—" She went to the door herself and opened it. "Ah! it is a courier from France," said Miss Stewart.

"A courier from France!" exclaimed Charles; "from my sister, perhaps?"—"Yes, Sire," said the usher,—"a special messenger."—"Let him come in at once," said Charles.

"You have a letter for me," said the king to the courier as he entered, "from Madame la Duchesse d'Orléans?"—"Yes, Sire," replied the courier; "and so urgent is its nature that I have been only twenty-six hours bringing it to your Majesty, and yet I lost three-quarters of an hour at Calais."—"Your zeal shall not be forgotten," said the king, as he opened the letter. When he had read it, he burst out laughing and exclaimed, "Upon my word, I don't understand anything about it." He then read the letter a second time, Miss Stewart assuming a manner marked by the greatest reserve, and doing her utmost to restrain her ardent curiosity.

"Francis," said the king to his valet, "see that this excellent fellow has proper refreshment and sleeps soundly, and that on waking to-morrow morning he finds a purse of fifty sovereigns by his bedside."—"Sire!" said the courier, amazed.—"Begone, begone! My sister was perfectly right in desiring you to use the utmost diligence; the affair was most pressing;" and he again began to laugh louder than ever. The courier, the valet, and Miss Stewart herself hardly knew what sort of countenance to assume. "Ah!" said the king, throwing himself back in his arm-chair, "when I think that you have ruined how many horses—"—"Two!"—"Two horses to bring this intelligence to me! That will do; you can leave us now."

The courier retired with the valet. Charles went to the window, which he opened, and leaning forward called out, "Duke! Duke of Buckingham! my dear Buckingham, come

here!" The duke hurried to him in obedience to the summons; but when he reached the door and perceived Miss Stewart, he hesitated to enter. "Come in, and shut the door, Duke!" said the king. The duke obeyed, and perceiving in what an excellent humour the king was, he advanced smilingly towards him. "Well, my dear Duke, how do you get on with your Frenchman?"

"Sire, I am in the most utter despair about him."—"Why so?"—"Because charming Miss Grafton is willing to marry him, but he is unwilling."—"Why, this Frenchman is a perfect Bœotian!" cried Miss Stewart. "Let him say either 'Yes' or 'No,' and let the affair end."

"But," said Buckingham, seriously, "you know, or you ought to know, Madame, that M. de Bragelonne is in love in another direction."—"In that case," said the king, coming to the help of Miss Stewart, "nothing is easier; let him say 'No,' then."—"Oh, but I have proved to him that he was wrong not to say 'Yes.'"—"Did you tell him candidly that La Vallière was deceiving him?"—"Yes, without the slightest reserve; and as soon as I had done so he gave a start, as if he were going to clear the Channel at a bound."

"At all events," said Miss Stewart, "he has done something, and that is really very fortunate."—"But," continued Buckingham, "I stopped him. I have left him and Miss Mary in conversation together; and I sincerely trust that now he will not leave, as he seemed to have an idea of doing."—"An idea of leaving England!" exclaimed the king.

"I at one moment hardly thought that any human power was capable of preventing him; but Miss Mary's eyes are now bent fully on him, and he will remain."—"Well, that is the very thing in which you are mistaken, Buckingham," said the king, with a peal of laughter; "the poor fellow is predestined."—"Predestined to what?"—"If it were to be simply deceived, that is nothing; still, to look at him, it is a great deal."—"At a distance, and with Miss Grafton's aid, the blow will be warded off."—"Far from it, far from it! he will have the aid neither of distance nor of Miss Grafton. Bragelonne will set off for Paris in an hour."

Buckingham started, and Miss Stewart opened her eyes very wide in astonishment. "But, Sire," said the duke, "your Majesty knows that it is impossible."—"That is to say, my dear Buckingham, that it is impossible until it happens."

"Do not forget, Sire, that the young man is a perfect lion,

and that his wrath is terrible."—"I don't deny it, my dear Villiers."—"If he sees his misfortune so near, so much the worse for the author of it."—"I don't deny it; but what do you expect me to do?"—"Were it the king himself," cried Buckingham, "I would not answer for him."—"Oh, the king has his musketeers to take care of him," said Charles, quietly; "I know that perfectly well, for I was kept dancing attendance in his antechamber at Blois. He has M. d'Artagnan,—there is a guardian for you! I should make myself perfectly easy with twenty storms of passion like those of your Bragelonne, if I had four guardians like M. d'Artagnan."

"But I entreat your Majesty, who is so good and kind, to reflect a little," said Buckingham.—"Stay!" said Charles II., presenting the letter to the duke; "read, and answer yourself what you would do in my place." Buckingham slowly took Madame's letter, and trembling with emotion read the following words:—

"For your own sake, for mine, for the honour and safety of every one, send M. de Bragelonne back to France immediately. Your devoted sister, HENRIETTA."

"Well, Villiers, what do you say?"—"Upon my word, Sire, I have nothing to say," replied the duke, amazed.—"Nay, would you, of all persons," said the king, artfully, "advise me not to listen to my sister when she writes so urgently?"—"Oh, no, no, Sire! and yet—"—"You've not read the postscript, Villiers; it is under the fold of the letter, and escaped my own eye at first. Read it." And as the duke turned down a fold of the letter, he read.—

"A thousand kind remembrances to those who love me."

The duke's head sank gradually on his breast; the paper trembled in his fingers, as if it had been changed to lead. The king paused for a moment, and seeing that Buckingham did not speak, "He must follow his destiny, as we ours," continued the king. "Every man has his share of suffering in this world; I have had my own, I have had that of others who belong to me, and have thus borne a double cross. But the deuce take all my cares now! Go and bring the gentleman here, Villiers."

The duke opened the trellised door of the summer-house, and pointing to Raoul and Mary, who were walking together side by side, said, "What a cruel blow, Sire, for poor Miss Grafton!"—"Nonsense! call him!" said Charles II., knitting his black

brows together. "Every one seems to be sentimental here. There, look at Miss Stewart, who is wiping her eyes; now deuce take the French fellow!"

The duke called to Raoul; and taking Miss Grafton by the hand, he led her to the king. "M. de Bragelonne," said Charles II., "did you not ask me the day before yesterday for permission to return to Paris?"—"Yes, Sire," replied Raoul, greatly puzzled by this opening.—"Well, my dear Viscount, I refused you, I think?"—"Yes, Sire."—"Were you not angry with me for it?"—"No, Sire; your Majesty had no doubt excellent reasons for withholding it, for you are so wise and so good that everything you do is well done."

"I alleged as a reason, I believe, that the King of France had not recalled you?"—"Yes, Sire, that was the reason you assigned."—"Well, M. de Bragelonne, I have considered the matter since. If the king did not in fact fix your return, he begged me to render your sojourn in England as agreeable as possible; since, however, you ask my permission to return, it is because your residence in England is no longer agreeable to you."—"I do not say that, Sire."—"No; but your request, at least," said the king, "signified that another place of residence would be more agreeable to you than this."

At this moment Raoul turned towards the door, against the frame of which Miss Grafton was leaning, pale and sorrow-stricken; her other arm was passed through the arm of the duke. "You do not reply," pursued Charles; "the French proverb is pertinent,—'Who does not speak, consents.' Very good, M. de Bragelonne, I am now in a position to satisfy you; whenever you please, therefore, you may leave for France. I authorise it."

"Sire!" exclaimed Raoul; while Mary stifled an exclamation of grief which rose to her lips, unconsciously pressing Buckingham's arm. "You can be at Dover this evening," continued the king; "the tide serves at two o'clock in the morning." Raoul, astounded, stammered a few words, which equally answered the purpose both of thanks and of excuse. "I therefore bid you adieu, M. de Bragelonne, and wish you every sort of prosperity," said the king, rising. "You will confer a pleasure on me by keeping this diamond in remembrance of me; I had intended it as a marriage gift."

Miss Grafton seemed ready to faint; and as Raoul received the diamond from the king's hand, he too felt his strength and courage failing him. He addressed a few respectful words to

the king, a passing compliment to Miss Stewart, and looked for Buckingham to bid him adieu. The king profited by this moment to disappear. Raoul found the duke engaged in endeavouring to encourage Miss Grafton. "Tell him to remain, I implore you!" said Buckingham to Mary.—"No! I will tell him to go," replied Miss Grafton, with returning animation. "I am not one of those women who have more pride than heart. If she whom he loves is in France let him return there, and bless me for having advised him to go thither and seek his happiness. If, on the contrary, she shall have ceased to love him, let him come back here again. I shall still love him, and his unhappiness will not have lessened him in my regard. In the arms of my house you will find that which Heaven has engraven on my heart: *Habenti parum, egenti cuncta,*—'To the rich is accorded little, to the poor everything.'"

"I do not believe, friend," said Buckingham, "that you will find yonder the equivalent of what you leave behind you here."—"I think, or at least I hope," said Raoul, with a gloomy air, "that she whom I love is worthy of my affection; but if it be true that she is unworthy of me, as you have endeavoured to make me believe, I will tear her image from my heart, Duke, even though my heart be broken in the attempt."

Mary Grafton lifted her eyes to him with an expression of ineffable compassion; and Raoul smiled sadly, saying, "Mademoiselle, the diamond which the king has given me was destined for you. Give me leave to offer it for your acceptance. If I marry in France, you will send it back to me; if I do not marry, keep it;" and he bowed and left her.

"What does he mean?" thought Buckingham, while Raoul pressed Miss Mary's icy hand with marked respect. Mary understood the look that Buckingham fixed upon her. "If it were a wedding-ring, I would not accept it," she said.

"And yet you were willing to ask him to return to you."—"Oh, Duke," cried the young girl, in heart-broken accents, "a woman such as I am is never accepted as a consolation by a man like him."—"You do not think he will return, then?"—"Never," said Miss Grafton, in a choking voice.—"And I grieve to tell you, Mary, that he will find yonder his happiness destroyed, his mistress lost to him, even his honour impaired. What will be left him, then, equal to your affection? Do you answer, Mary,—you who know yourself so well."

Miss Grafton placed her white hand on Buckingham's arm; and while Raoul was hurrying away with headlong speed down

the avenue of lindens, she repeated in dying accents the line from *Romeo and Juliet*,—"I must be gone and live, or stay and die." As she finished the last word, Raoul had disappeared. Miss Grafton returned to her own apartment, paler and more silent than death itself. Buckingham availed himself of the arrival of the courier who had brought the letter to the king, to write to Madame and to the Comte de Guiche. The king had not been mistaken; for at two in the morning the tide was at full flood, and Raoul had embarked for France.

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